

AFC QUARTERLY

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION

ISSUE 12

PLUS

GUAM

The island nation on the rise and making history

Cha Du-ri

Veteran defender reflects as career draws to a close

TAKASHI USAMI

Japan star finally living up to his potential

FC Istiklol

The Tajik Club making their mark on the continent

ISSUE
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October 2015



VAHID SHAMSAEE

Iranian futsal icon on his trophy-laden legacy following AFC Futsal Club Championship success with Tasisat Daryaei



ASAKO TAKAKURA

Hugely successful Japan coach maintains winning streak, but what is next for the three-time AFC Women's Coach of the Year?



HASAN AL HAYDOS

Qatar captain looks to the future following 2015 AFC Asian Cup disappointment with the 2022 FIFA World Cup looming.

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Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa

AFC President



Dear friends,

Yet again it has been a busy, yet exciting, period for the Asian Football Confederation and Asian football, both on and off the pitch.

The AFC Champions League and AFC Cup knockout stages, as well as the 2018 FIFA World Cup and 2019 AFC Asian Cup joint qualifiers, have provided us with some memorable football. The stage is now set for what are sure to be enthralling climaxes to our club competitions. I wish all the teams competing the very best of luck.

The race to reach Russia in 2018 and the United Arab Emirates in 2019 is in full swing and, as with the club competitions; there have already been some magnificent performances.

The drama has undoubtedly been added to by the fact that the 2019 AFC Asian Cup has been expanded to 24 teams, thereby providing an additional incentive for teams to qualify for Asia's flagship national team competition.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again congratulate Japan and the Japan Football Association for winning the AFC U-19 Women's Championship by beating DPR Korea on penalties in Nanjing. Japan's continued success at youth level shows the country remains a force to be reckoned with when it comes to women's football.

In addition, I am proud to say that the AFC is playing a leading role in taking women's futsal forward, with September's AFC Women's Futsal Championship in Malaysia underlining that fact. The competition was the first time the continent had witnessed an Asian women's futsal championship and the AFC firmly believes that football and futsal can act as a positive catalyst globally, that the two can change lives - especially for women and girls in Asia.

Off the pitch, the AFC hosted its first National Coaches Conference in August in Kuala Lumpur. The event, which we plan to hold regularly, was a great success and the feedback garnered from coaches and technical experts will help chart a successful future for Asian football.

October will also see two other important AFC events: the AFC Women's Elite National Coaches' Forum and the AFC Youth Conference on technical development.

The world of football is currently going through some vital reforms and the AFC is playing an active role to ensure football becomes the number one sport throughout the world, not only in terms of participation and appeal, but also in terms of image.

The coming months will be a crucial period for the game, however, by working together and being united, we can ensure football remains on a steady footing, and Asia remains on the path to success.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President

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Gallery

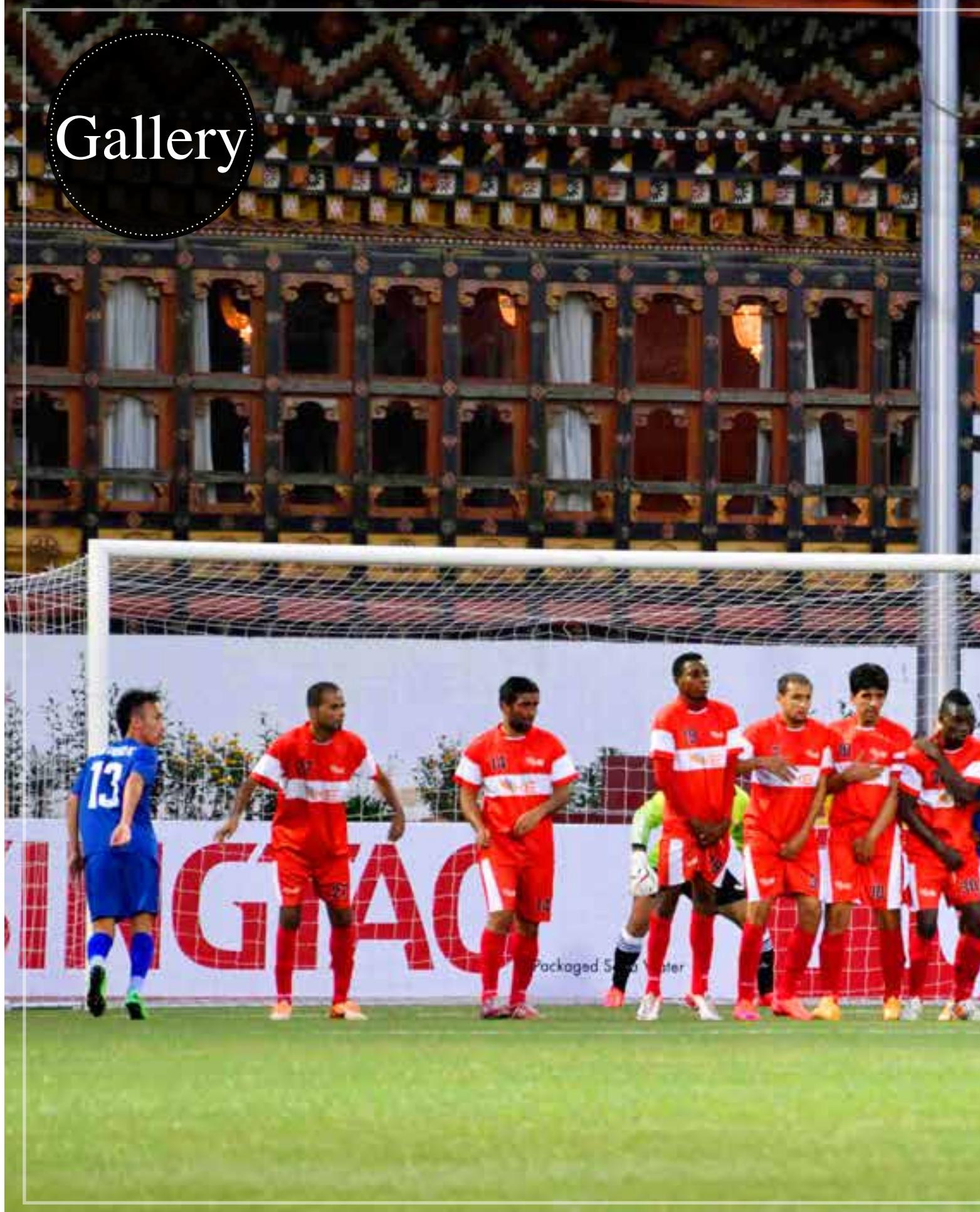




Striking Debut

Brazilian midfielder Paulinho scored a stunning first half free-kick on his AFC Champions League debut as former winners Guangzhou Evergrande from China beat Japan's Kashiwa Reysol 3-1 in the first leg of their AFC Champions League quarter-final at the end of August.

Gallery

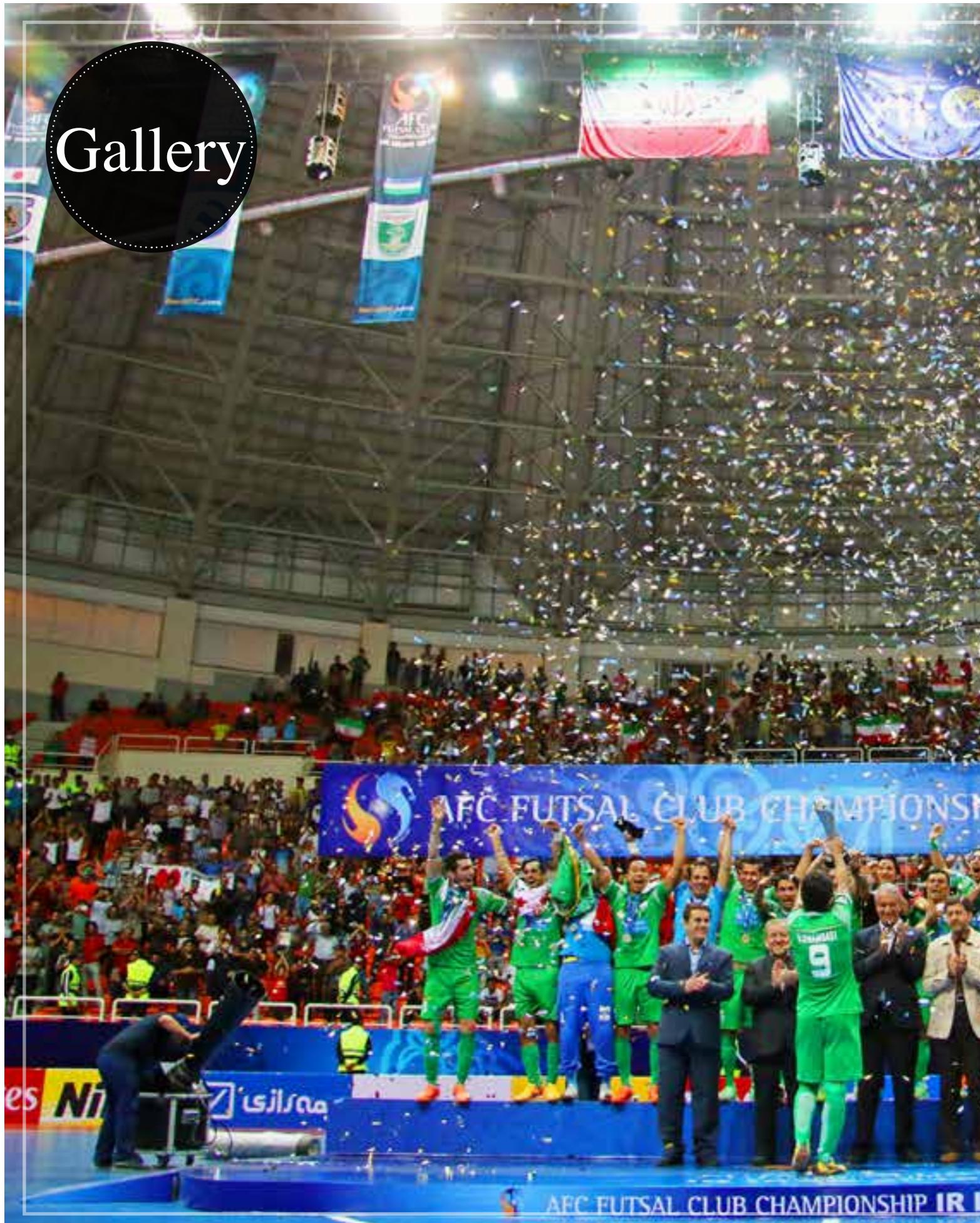




To The Next Level

Pakistan's K-Electric FC and Bangladesh's Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhamondi Club remained on course for the 2016 AFC Cup after winning their respective groups of the play-off qualifiers played in Bhutan (pictured) and Kyrgyzstan in August.

Gallery





Home Comforts

Hosts Tasisat Daryaei won the AFC Futsal Club Championship at the start of August after recording a 5-4 victory over Kuwait's Qadsia SC to return the title to Iran for the first time since 2012, with veteran Vahid Shamsaei named the tournament's MVP and top scorer.



Continental Heavyweights Take Centre Stage

AUSTRALIA, KOREA REPUBLIC, IRAN AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES ARE IN POLE POSITION TO ADVANCE IN THE JOINT QUALIFIERS FOR THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP AND 2019 AFC ASIAN CUP FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER'S ROUND OF FIXTURES.

Asia's leading sides moved to the forefront as the second round of joint qualifiers for the 2018 FIFA World Cup and 2019 AFC Asian Cup continued in September, with continental champions Australia as well as Korea

Republic, Iran and the United Arab Emirates all leading their respective groups.

After lower ranked nations Guam and Hong Kong grabbed the headlines at the start of the qualifying campaign in June, the group tables began to take shape with the majority of sides having played three games by September.

In Group B, Australia followed up June's win over Kyrgyzstan with back-to-back successes over Bangladesh and Tajikistan to move two points clear of Jordan after the 2015 AFC Asian Cup winners maintained their 100% record.

Australia first recorded a 5-0 win over Bangladesh with Tom Rogic twice on target in the first half in Perth before Tim Cahill also netted a brace as the Socceroos beat Tajikistan 3-0 in Dushanbe.

Korea Republic were already in place at the top of Group G after beating Myanmar in June, and the 2015 continental finalists moved six points clear at the top of the table alongside Kuwait after posting wins over Laos and Lebanon.

Iran, meanwhile, moved into a three-way tie with Oman and Guam at the top of Group D.

Guam, who earlier beat both Turkmenistan and India at home, lost 6-0 in Iran but were able to bounce back with a goalless draw against Oman.

The United Arab Emirates beat Malaysia before drawing with Palestine in Group A

having earlier edged out Timor Leste.

Elsewhere, Qatar moved two points clear of China and Hong Kong at the top of Group C, with Japan two points behind Group E leaders Syria following wins over Cambodia and Afghanistan.

In Group F, Thailand came back from two goals down to draw 2-2 with Iraq to remain at the top of the table, while DPR Korea maintained their 100% record in Group H with a 1-0 win over Bahrain.

Following the conclusion of the qualifying campaign in March next year, the group winners and the four best runners-up will advance directly to the 2019 AFC Asian Cup as well as the final round of qualifying for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

The next best 24 teams will compete in a separate competition for the remaining places at the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.



Korea Republic Test For Defending Champions Iraq

THE DRAW FOR THE 2016 AFC U23 CHAMPIONSHIP TOOK PLACE IN SEPTEMBER, WITH THE TOURNAMENT DOUBLING AS THE QUALIFIERS FOR THE 2016 OLYMPIC GAMES AND THE TOP THREE PLACED SIDES REPRESENTING ASIA IN BRAZIL NEXT YEAR.

Defending champions Iraq will face 2012 Olympic Games bronze medalists Korea Republic, Uzbekistan and Yemen in Group C of the 2016 AFC U23 Championship following September's draw in Doha.

Iraq claimed the inaugural title in 2014 after edging out Saudi Arabia 1-0 in the final.

But with the 2016 edition, which will take place between January 12-30, doubling as the qualifiers for the 2016 Olympic Games, the top three teams will also represent Asia in Brazil.

Hosts and 2014 AFC U-19 Championship winners Qatar will face Syria, Iran and China in Group A, with Jordan, Australia, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam drawn in Group D.

Japan, who lost the bronze medal play-off to Korea Republic in London in 2012, begin their

campaign in Group B alongside 2014 finalists Saudi Arabia, DPR Korea and Thailand.

"Many of the players will have experienced continental football tournaments in the past through participation in the AFC U-19 and U-16 Championships, or youth and grassroots events," said AFC Vice President Saoud A. Aziz M A Al Mohannadi.

AFC U23 Championship

Group A	Qatar, Syria, Iran, China
Group B	Saudi Arabia, Japan, DPR Korea, Thailand
Group C	Iraq, Korea Republic, Uzbekistan, Yemen
Group D	Jordan, Australia, UAE, Vietnam

"Now, these players, many of whom are already regulars in top teams, are finishing their school and we hope the valuable experience they gain will help them during their appearances at the AFC Asian Cup in the future."

Prior to the draw, Al Mohannadi and AFC Acting General Secretary Windsor John jointly unveiled the new AFC U23 Championship trophy, while a new tournament logo was also revealed.

"We all know that the 2016 AFC U23 Championship is considered as the second biggest tournament on the continent after the AFC Asian Cup. Since the event doubles as qualification for the Olympics, it's of great significance to all the participating teams," said Qatar Football Association General Secretary Mansoor Al Ansari.

"We had the privilege of hosting the 2011 AFC Asian Cup. Its success put us on a great pedestal as far as the organisation of major events is concerned.

"We aim to keep on gaining experience and prove that we're capable of hosting more of them."



Japan Edge Out DPR Korea To Land U-19 Women's Title

JAPAN CLAIMED A RECORD FOURTH AFC U-19 WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE AT THE END OF AUGUST AFTER DEFEATING DPR KOREA ON PENALTIES IN THE FINAL FOLLOWING A GOALLESS DRAW.

Japan won the AFC U-19 Women's Championship after a dramatic 4-2 penalty shootout victory over DPR Korea in the final at the end of August following a 0-0 draw after extra-time. The Young Nadeshiko controlled the first half at Nanjing's Jiangning Sports Centre Stadium before Hwang Yong-bong's DPR Korea twice nearly grabbed late winners through Ri Un-sim and Kim Un-hwa only to be denied by world-class saves from goalkeeper Chika Hirao as the tie went to extra-time.

And after 120 minutes was unable to separate the two sides, Japan held their nerve by netting all four penalties while goalkeeper Hirao first saved from Jo Ryon-hwa before watching Wi Jong-sim's spot-kick sail wide

as the Young Nadeshiko secured a record-breaking fourth continental crown.

"Japan had a great tournament, and they particularly impressed in the final third of the pitch," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"I would like to congratulate the whole team, the coaching staff and the Japan Football Association for their excellent performance and a deserved victory. Japan have a track record of winning this competition and I look forward to seeing how the team, along with DPR Korea and Korea Republic, perform at the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup next year.

"Asia has some of the world's best women's national teams: five of the top 20 women's national teams are from the AFC. That creates expectations, and we need to make sure we keep delivering on them. This tournament has again shown that women's football in Asia has

a bright future, and that our women's football development programmes are delivering results."

Japan striker Rikako Kobayashi was named the tournament's MVP, while DPR Korea forward Ri Un-sim took home the top scorer accolade after netting six goals.

Both Japan and DPR Korea had already secured their place at the 2016 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup having progressed to the final, and they were joined at the tournament, which will be played in Papua New Guinea next year, by Korea Republic, who recorded a 4-0 win over hosts China in the third place play-off.

Midfielder Son Hwa-yeon scored a brace as 2013 winners Korea Republic bounced back from their semi-final defeat by Japan, while China fell just short after earlier losing to DPR Korea.



Hosts Tasisat Daryaei Claim Futsal Club Crown

VAHID SHAMSAEE WAS NAMED THE MVP AND TOP SCORER AS TASISAT DARYAEI BECAME THE FIRST IRANIAN CLUB SINCE 2012 TO WIN THE AFC FUTSAL CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP AFTER BEATING KUWAIT'S QADSIA SC 5-4 IN THE FINAL AT THE START OF AUGUST.

Asghar Hassanzadeh scored twice while Ghodrat Bahadori, Reza Sangsefidi and Vahid Shamsaei were on target as Iran's Tasisat Daryaei won the AFC Futsal Club Championship at the start of August after a 5-4 win over Kuwait's Qadsia SC in the final completed a 100% record for the tournament hosts.

Tasisat had beaten Qadsia 9-2 in the group stage, but with Abdulrahman Al Wadi netting a brace and Hamad Hayat and Abdulrahman Al Tawail also on target, Amir Shamsaei's side were made to work much harder for the win in the competition climax.

But after holding onto their advantage after Al Tawail's goal in the final seconds made for a nervous finish, Tasisat became the first Iranian winner of the AFC Futsal Club Championship

title since Giti Pasand Isfahan in 2012.

"I'm so happy that after three years we have been able to get the trophy and it's now in Iran," said Tasisat coach Shamsaei.

"It was so hard to get it and we worked hard. We were training twice a day and there were lots of problems, but I'm really happy we were able to win.

"Finals are always played under special conditions. It was a hard game and going into it I thought that if we won 1-0 or 10-0 there is no difference, the most important thing is that you get the trophy at the end of the game.

"In the second half we took the game and tried to slow it down, but the Kuwaitis tried their best. They pressed us, but I'm happy we were able to get the trophy at the end of the game."

After taking his tally to 10 goals having netted in the final, 39-year-old Iranian legend

Shamsaei was named the tournament's MVP and top scorer.

Shamsaei scored in every one of Tasisat's matches and his tally included four goals in the 9-2 win over Qadsia in the final round of group matches as well as a crucial double in the 4-3 win over defending champions Nagoya Oceans in the quarter-finals.

Third-place finishers Thai Son Nam from Thailand, meanwhile, claimed the Fair Play award.

"We were not the favourites in this tournament, but usually in these tournaments there is one surprise and the message for my team at the start five to six weeks ago when we started to prepare for this tournament was that we could be the surprise," said Thai Son Nam coach Bruno Garcia.

THE COMEBACK KID

JAPAN STRIKER TAKASHI USAMI IS FINALLY LIVING UP TO HIS POTENTIAL HAVING RETUNED TO GAMBA OSAKA FOLLOWING A SPELL IN GERMANY, AND IS OUT TO PROVE HIMSELF ON THE DOMESTIC, CONTINENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL STAGES.

By: Sean Carroll Photos: Lagardère Sports/Getty Images







There is always a danger that prodigiously talented young footballers will not reach the heights at which they initially promise to soar.

Whether it is struggling to cope with the expectation, or simply a loss of motivation after succumbing to the trappings of wealth and fame, there have been a slew of such players over the years. And, for a time, it looked as though Takashi Usami may also slip through the net.

But the Gamba Osaka forward has overcome some teething difficulties and, still aged just 23, is firmly re-established as one of the brightest stars in Asia.

Usami introduced himself to the continent with a goal on his Gamba debut back in 2009, coolly tucking home a one-on-one against FC Seoul in the AFC Champions League at the age of just 17 years and 14 days.

In doing so he became Gamba's youngest-ever scorer and set the record as the youngest Japanese player to find the net in the AFC Champions League.

His development continued steadily under the expert guidance of 2008 AFC Coach of the Year Akira Nishino.

And by the spring of 2011 he had piqued the interest of then-Japan boss Alberto Zaccheroni, who brought him into the national

team fold.

Then Bayern Munich came calling. Few could resist the allure of the 25-time German champions, and Usami was not about to pass up the opportunity, agreeing a loan to

"FOR ME PERSONALLY THOSE TWO YEARS WERE VITAL EXPERIENCE. THE ONE YEAR AT BAYERN, IN PARTICULAR, WAS A RICH EXPERIENCE FOR ME – I LEARNED MANY THINGS BY TRAINING ALONGSIDE SUCH TOP PLAYERS."

the Bundesliga side in June 2011.

Unfortunately things did not work out as well as they might have in Munich, and despite making the bench for the UEFA Champions League final, he was loaned to Hoffenheim for the following season before returning to Gamba in the summer of 2013.

"I wasn't able to achieve any obviously quantifiable results, and I don't have a feeling of accomplishment in that respect, but I really feel that it was good for me to have gone," says the Kyoto native.

"For me personally, those two years were vital experience.

'The one year at Bayern, in particular,

was a rich experience for me – I learned many things by training alongside such top players. It was fun. Every day at practice was stimulating – I think it was a huge plus for me to have been able to receive such top-class coaching every day."

For many players returning home after failing to adjust to foreign climes is a chastening experience from which they struggle to recover. That was not the case for Usami, though, whose Gamba comeback could not have gone much better.

He struck a phenomenal 19 goals in 18 games as the team surged to the second division title in 2013, then made double figures again last season as he and Brazilian strike partner Patric fired Gamba to a domestic treble of J.League, Nabisco Cup and Emperor's Cup titles.

"I'm not interested in other players and don't want to talk about them, but for me, things have gone as I would have hoped," Usami says of his reintegration in Osaka.

"I want to gather more experience and then challenge myself once more overseas. I definitely have that kind of motivation."

That mental strength can be in part attributed to some frank advice he received as a youngster.

"One of my coaches when I was around elementary school age told me, 'you're not



a genius' and that I had to keep working hard to make the most of my ability," Usami recalls.

"It wasn't that I was a selfish player – I was naturally inclined to work on my drills and techniques – but what he was saying was that I should never forget to do that, even in the future once I'd developed into a skillful player.

"That I shouldn't think I'm a genius, but to instead remember the effort it took to get there and that would continue to be needed going forward."

Usami's constant improvement demonstrates that he has subscribed to that work ethic, and despite still being one of the youngest members of Gamba's senior squad, he is considered – and considers himself – as one of the figures who must assume responsibility on the pitch.

"I'm in around my seventh or eighth season so I'm not a young player, but I don't think of myself as a veteran," he explains.

"Of course, I've also had the experience of playing overseas so I'm not in the same position as other young players, though.

"I feel that within the team I have to make the biggest contribution. But rather than giving advice to the young players I try to show it in my play. More so than saying things to them, I think it's better to just play to the best of my ability and for them to try and pick things up by playing alongside me."

That tactic certainly paid off last season,

Left Against FC Seoul in the 2009 AFC Champions League

Above Training with Bayern Munich

"IT PUSHED ME AND MADE ME REALISE I STILL HAD A LOT TO DO. IT MADE ME AWARE OF THE FACT THAT I STILL HAD THINGS TO IMPROVE UPON."

although Usami makes no attempt to take any special credit for Gamba's trophy haul.

"With regards to the treble, we took the three trophies as a team, more so than it being just one player who was responsible for producing results," he says.

"The players who came off the bench made big contributions and when there were injuries and people couldn't play, those who replaced them all played their part and showed what they could do."

"For me that was the key behind it, more so than an individual."

Indeed, based on his experience training with some of the world's finest players at Bayern, Usami believes that he and his compatriots are more than capable of mixing it with the best.

"The quality of football and way of doing things is of course different, but when it comes to technique when dealing with the

ball, I don't think Japanese players give up any ground," he says.

There are still other areas of the game that he feels Japanese players do need to improve, however, and he sees the AFC Champions League as the ideal place to work on those aspects.

"In the J.League and ACL, the manner of contesting possession is completely different. The physicality – the importance of physicality – is completely different.

"There are many teams who are technically adept and also incredibly physical, and I feel that's very different.

"I like it. I think it's good to have a proper contest. Being able to play and know how to avoid that kind of challenge is very important and I enjoy that. I actually prefer that style. I certainly feel that the level of Asian football is rising, and I'm aware of the fact that we have to keep raising the level of the Japanese game in order to compete with the best."

"In the ACL, we need to be aiming for a situation whereby, as a base, Japanese teams are always in the semi-finals. That ideal is a long way off, I think, but in order to achieve it Japanese teams need to keep working to strengthen."

Usami has contributed towards that quota this season, and although he was suspended for Gamba's decisive 3-2



second leg win over Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors in the quarter-finals, he had already struck four goals in the competition and will be vital to their chances of success in the semi-final against China's Guangzhou Evergrande.

As well as targeting improvement on the pitch, Usami is also hopeful that Japanese coaches will start to test themselves abroad.

"I think they have the ability, but no-one's really tried yet," he says. "Of course there are differences with regards to language and culture, which make it difficult, but I think that if a player were able to achieve legendary status with success in the J.League and with the national team, then it's conceivable that they could go on to try their hand as a coach overseas."

"If someone was to do that – which no-one has yet – it would be beneficial to the development of Asian football as a whole."

When it comes to coaches of the national team, meanwhile, Usami has had a bit of a difficult ride. While Zaccheroni acknowledged the potential of the talented teen back in 2011, he was never capped under the Italian, and despite scoring for fun upon his return to Japan, Usami was similarly given the cold shoulder by Javier Aguirre during his brief spell at the helm.

That may in part have had something to do with Usami's playing style, which can appear to be less about constant endeavor and more

about effective movement and action when necessary.

Aguirre, for instance, constantly spoke of being concerned with what his players did for the 88 minutes in the game when they did not have possession, and there are games when you may not notice Usami for large spells. However, he certainly makes his presence felt when he does have the ball at his feet.

Such an approach to the beautiful game is hardly surprising when considering who he draws his inspiration from.

"Ronaldinho," he responds, when asked

"I FEEL THAT WITHIN THE TEAM I HAVE TO MAKE THE BIGGEST CONTRIBUTION. BUT RATHER THAN GIVING ADVICE TO THE YOUNG PLAYERS I TRY TO SHOW IT IN MY PLAY."

for his idol as a youngster. "When he was at Barcelona, that was when he was at his best. I was around 13 or 14 at the time and used to try and copy some of his skills and audacious passing. Of course I wasn't able to get anywhere near his quality though."

There are few who can replicate the unpredictability and effectiveness of one of Brazilian football's greatest mavericks, but it

is indicative of his personality that that is the level Usami aspires to.

And despite failing to make the Japan squads for either the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil or 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia, Usami never let his head drop, instead opting to use the snubs as motivation.

"I wouldn't say I was disappointed, more that it gave me strength," he says.

"It pushed me and made me realise I still had a lot to do. It made me aware of the fact that I still had things to improve upon."

"I felt that I wanted to get in – that I had to work hard to achieve that."

"With the results I'd achieved I wasn't selected, so I was aware I was still lacking something."

Ultimately he was rewarded for his perseverance, with Vahid Halilhodzic replacing Aguirre after the AFC Asian Cup and deciding that he liked the cut of Usami's gib.

He made his debut in Halilhodzic's first game against Tunisia in March, and scored his first national team goal in the next match, a 5-1 drubbing of Uzbekistan.

Since then, Usami has played in each of the former Cote d'Ivoire and Algeria coach's games, including all three at the East Asian Cup and Japan's joint 2018



FIFA World Cup 2018 and 2019 AFC Asian Cup second round qualifier wins against Cambodia and Afghanistan in September.

The respect between player and manager is clearly mutual, and Usami is thoroughly enjoying working under Halilhodzic.

"He's come and picked up on lots of things lacking in Japanese football, and is very specific with his demands," he says.

"Personally, I'm very grateful to him and want to do all I can to meet his demands as soon as possible."

Although Leicester City's Shinji Okazaki is steadily establishing himself as a thoroughly effective goal-getter for club and country, Japan has traditionally struggled to produce truly cut-throat centre-forwards, and that is something Usami is aiming to address.

"I think all forward players have to have that kind of awareness – that we have to be able to convert chances when they arrive," he says.

"Those kind of decisive players are vital. I'm no different in that respect and want to become that kind of player and make sure I work hard every day in order to do so. I think that's the most important thing."

When it comes to the team as a whole, meanwhile, the bare minimum is progression to the knockout stage of the FIFA World Cup.

"We have to get into the best 16 and then see where we can go from there," Usami

Left AFC Champions League 2015

Above Against Cambodia in September 2015

states.

"Before that, though, we have to make sure we get to the World Cup. And for me personally, I'm aiming to be able to play there and to contribute to the team gaining good results."

Players of Usami's quality are vital to that aim, and he has a very clear idea about what he wants to bring to the national team fold.

"At the Asian Cup and the East Asian Cup there was a sense of not being able to overwhelm opponents," he observes.

"We still have to work on that and make sure that regardless of the situation we are able to win."

"I think that there is a need for players who are able to create chances from nothing."

"For me personally, that's the kind of player I am trying to become."

"It's incredibly important to have players who can keep creating chances when nothing seems on, and I always have that awareness."

Usami has already shown time and again that he can produce the goods when least expected and, genius or not, his results are steadily improving. It is surely only a matter of time before he makes it to the top of the class.



Takashi Usami

Nationality:

Japan

DOB:

06/05/1992

Position:

Forward

Current club:

Gamba Osaka (Japan)

Previous clubs:

Bayern Munich,
Hoffenheim
(both Germany)

A NEW HOPE

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST YOUNG PLAYERS AT THE 2015 FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP, TANG JIALI IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF A YOUNG GENERATION OF CHINESE WOMEN WHO ARE LOOKING TO RESTORE THE STEEL ROSES TO THEIR FORMER GLORIES WITH THE QUALIFIERS FOR THE 2016 OLYMPIC GAMES ON THE HORIZON.

By: Christopher Atkins Photo: Getty Images

For coach Hao Wei and his China side, the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup was an unqualified—and perhaps even unexpected—success. After missing out on the 2011 edition in Germany as a result of a disappointing fourth place finish at the 2010 AFC Women's Asian Cup hosted on home soil in Chengdu, the Steel Roses bounced back from that heartbreak to secure third place at the continental championship in Vietnam last year, and with it qualification to the FIFA event in Canada this summer.

Yet, despite being eight-time Asian champions and 1999 FIFA World Cup finalists, recent records at the continental and regional level had been underwhelming for a side that boasts such pedigree in the women's game.

And so, a quarter-final finish at the FIFA World Cup having been eliminated by eventual champions the United States of America was thus a real positive for the team.

More so than the results achieved, it was the emergence of a new generation of talent which was perhaps most encouraging for the future of the game in China.

The youngest squad at the tournament, they stood up to the challenges presented and more than held their own.

Captain Wu Haiyan, 22, led the side with real conviction from the back, while 20-year-old Tan Ruyin belied her age with a series of composed midfield performances.

However, above all others it was the performances of attacking midfielder Tang Jiali which caught the eye.

In particular, it was in China's second outing of the tournament against the Netherlands that Tang stood out.

Given plentiful space to play by their Dutch opponents, China dazzled and none more so than their young number 13.

Five of 10 shots on goal, one of which left the crossbar shaking violently, left the crowd in Edmonton enthralled.

And from relative obscurity having only

made her full debut for the senior national team in December 2014, Tang was immediately thrust into the limelight.

"I could never have imagined that I'd suddenly receive so much attention, I'd never experienced anything like that before," says Tang.

"Actually, in that game with Netherlands it was not only me who played well.

"The whole side put in a good performance to create so many chances. I thought I was nothing special myself!"

Tang's impressive performances in the tournament earned the talented 20-year-old a nomination for FIFA's Best Young Player accolade alongside Norway's Ada Hegerberg and eventual award winner Kadeisha Buchanan of Canada as acknowledgement for her contributions.

"I'm grateful for FIFA's recognition; it's a sign that I must be doing something right. However, I still have so many areas of my game to improve," she says.

"It is now something I can use to motivate me going forward. I can take confidence from it."

For the young Shanghai-native the FIFA World Cup signalled the end of her induction into international football.

She had been thrown in at the deep-end and did not just survive but, indeed, thrived.

And within China, many are already beginning to pin hopes for the future firmly on the shoulders of Tang and others of her generation.

"I have a lot of hope for Tang and Wang Shuang in particular," says Chinese football icon Sun Wen, once voted FIFA Female Player of the century for her remarkable achievements in the game.

"What sets them apart is that they are bold enough to express themselves on the pitch."

There are few better placed in Chinese football to judge the respective merits of the women's national team than Sun, and her feelings are echoed by many.

Now, they will once more play a key role at next summer's Olympic Games

should China navigate their way through qualification under a new head coach.

"The Olympics is always such a big event and so very important for China as a nation, I just hope we don't disappoint people," Tang adds.

"We will have to use the next few months well to make sure we are fully prepared for the tournament."

Having begun her footballing journey at age eight in Shanghai before being picked out as a talent during a trial at her school, Tang has already experienced much in her short career having attended two East Asian Cups, the U-17 and U-20 FIFA World Cups and, now, the FIFA World Cup proper.

But despite an Olympics also being on the horizon, Tang is looking further into the future with a view to continuing the improvements she has shown over the past 12 months.

"I think we still lack a bit physically and in terms of individual ability against the top sides, but our team unit is strong," she says.

"When we are in high pressure games we still need to keep our composure better in attack."

As for her ambitions, Tang's thinking is relatively simple—to replicate the success of Brazil's Marta, one of her childhood idols.

"Marta is, of course, a player I like a lot and there is so much I can learn from her," Tang said.

"I'm nowhere near her level but she was my idol growing up, along with Sun Wen and my coach Shui Qingxia."

"But when it comes to football in general, my favourite was David Villa."

There is momentum growing in Chinese women's football, with the formation of a new Super League this year and the performance in Canada doing much to bring a younger generation of supporters back to the sport.

And in February, China will travel to Japan for the 2016 Olympic Games qualification tournament, with just two places in Rio de Janeiro up for grabs.

For Tang and her team-mates, it is an opportunity to ensure they are once more in the spotlight in a nation looking for future success and a return to former glories.





STAR QUALITY

VAHID SHAMSAEE IS
WIDELY SEEN AS ASIA'S
GREATEST EVER FUTSAL
PLAYER AND ONE OF THE
FINEST EXPONENTS OF THE
INDOOR GAME GLOBALLY,
AND AS THE VETERAN
IRANIAN APPROACHES THE
END OF HIS ILLUSTRIOS
CAREER, HE REFLECTS ON
A JOURNEY THAT STARTED
WITH VERY DIFFERENT
GOALS IN MIND.

By: Michael Church **Photos:** Lagardère Sports







Vahid Shamsaei's list of honours appears endless; no one has won more continental titles or individual awards, or scored more goals on a futsal court than the softly spoken man from Tehran.

His 390 goals in international competition ranks him amongst futsal's most prolific scorers and he remains, at 39 years of age, one of the undoubted stars of the indoor game.

Shamsaei is lauded wherever he goes, and his influence remains strong on the court as he proved in leading Tasisat Daryaei to the AFC Futsal Club Championship crown in August.

And yet, for all his astonishing success and unquestioned talent, the motivation to take up the sport seriously was one to which almost every amateur sportsperson can relate; the desire to shed a few kilograms. Or, in Shamsaei's case, more than a few.

"I was 20 years old and I was a businessman and I weighed 106 kilograms. I was too fat," says the now markedly more lighter Shamsaei. "When I went to play futsal, the coach saw me play and he asked: 'Are you a wrestler or a weightlifter?' So I had to work to lose that weight, more than 30 kilograms,

and I did it in six months and that's when I started my journey to become the best player in Asia.

"I started at 106 kilograms and six months later, when I played in Thailand in 2000, I was down to 73 kilograms. I always make a point of losing weight during a tournament, so during competitions I only eat one meal a day, low calorie. I had lost my job and I was having problems. I was looking for something to help relieve the stress, so I started playing futsal. And that's how it started. My brother was a former futsal player and he tried to bring me to the field to help me to forget the problems I was having, and I've been involved in the game ever since."

Instead of overindulging at the dinner table, Shamsaei developed a voracious appetite for success. His career began in 1999 and by 2000 he was representing Iran at the AFC Futsal Championship in Bangkok, helping his country to a successful defence of the title they had won the year before in Malaysia.

He quickly took the futsal world by storm, establishing himself amongst the finest players in the sport while leading Iran to eight continental titles during his career. Shamsaei was twice named AFC Futsal Player of the Year and was regularly crowned the MVP at the continental championship. His status at

home – where he has spent the vast majority of his career apart from a stint in Italy with Lazio and a short stay in China with Shenzhen Nanling – reflects not only his immense success, but the humble way in which it has been achieved.

Barely a second goes by when Shamsaei is on court that the Iranian fans are not lauding him or chanting his name; in return, Shamsaei rewards their affection with goals and game-changing performances.

"When I started as a futsal player, nobody knew who I was, but the fans were the key point to introducing me," he says.

"Many Iranian people have a very tough life and I have tried to make them happy and do my best for the people. This is what has led to me having a special relationship with the Iranian people. My motivation is important to me and in each tournament I keep my motivation to try to go to the next level and I always want to be the champion, my motivation is always to go up, to improve."

He may no longer be involved on-court with the national team – "there's a new generation coming through to play," he says – but Shamsaei continues to taste success while preparing for the day he no longer crosses the white line with his team mates.

And while his brother Amir was listed as



coach as Tasisat for the AFC Futsal Club Championship success, it was Vahid who was really in charge, having coached the team to the domestic title before sweeping all before them in the continental club championship.

Not satisfied with being the tactical mastermind behind the win, Shamsaee finished the tournament as top scorer and as the MVP as he claimed the AFC Futsal Club Championship title for the second time.

Age may be catching up with him, but as his displays in Isfahan showed, he retains the ability to turn a game in his team's favour, both with the ball at his feet and via his tactical and technical knowledge. How much longer he will continue to play remains open to question, but there is no doubt Shamsaee will remain heavily involved in futsal in Iran and elsewhere.

"I always try to keep myself in top condition during the tournaments, but it gets harder as you get older, there's no doubt about that," he says. "But I always try to do my best. When you're young, you are active but as you get older you try to imitate what you used to do.

"I still enjoy playing and you have to make sure you make the right step for the future. I'm still thinking about the situation. I always try to convey my feelings and experience to the new generation, to try to show them how to improve. That's something I always want to be involved

Far Left AFC Futsal Championship 2000

Top Left AFC Futsal Championship 2001

Above AFC Futsal Club Championship 2015

Bottom Left AFC Futsal Championship 2012

in."

One of those Shamsaee has taken under his wing is Tasisat's Mohammad Reza Sangsafidi, who has developed into not only a member of the team that won the continental club title but who made his debut appearance for the national team.

"When I saw he was talented, he spent two years training along with me," says Shamsaee. "When I started coaching, I invited him to join me and I trusted him. We gave him time and now you can see he is doing well. He has been invited to play for the national team and he is one of the best."

"Futsal in Iran comes from street football, and when we look in the past with the people playing on the street and the small goals, it was a game all of the poor people in Iran played," he says of the game's deep roots in Iran. "Around Iran, if you go out, you can find a lot of talent and you can see people playing like this. This is our story. You can see so many different types of talent on the streets and also in the schools in Iran. This is how it

is in Iran.

"The new generation has a big separation between football and futsal. Of course, sometimes futsal can support the technical aspects of the game of football, but now I believe we have a big separation and if the players want to go into futsal they can and go and have a different career."

With his playing days drawing to close, Shamsaee is determined to play a major role in further strengthening futsal throughout Iran, with the goal to one day be a serious challenger for the world title.

"We've found lots of young players, skillful ones," he says. "But these players need to be well managed because that's the best way to improve. If we can find a good way then we can be among the best teams in the world not only Asia. But we have to do that. We need more long-term planning. At the minute we only focus on the short term, but we need to work. I have a special plan. Iranians always think only about the results, but we need to change that. When you want to make changes, you have to challenge things and that's something I want to do. It's difficult but it's something I want to do."

"I want to do something, but to do it alone is impossible. The challenge will always be there. I want to do the difficult things."



RIDING THE CURVE

AN AFC ASIAN CUP WINNER AND FIFA WORLD CUP VETERAN BEFORE HIS 23RD BIRTHDAY, AUSTRALIA GOALKEEPER MAT RYAN

HAS TAKEN THE NEXT STEP IN HIS FAST-MOVING CAREER BY SIGNING FOR SPAIN'S VALENCIA, AND THE CHALLENGES THE FORMER CENTRAL COAST MARINERS CUSTODIAN FACES ARE BOTH NEW AND FAMILIAR.

By: Michael Church **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Getty Images







The palm trees that line Valencia's training complex in the suburb of Paterna, on the outskirts of Spain's third largest city and situated on the Mediterranean coast, serve as a comforting reminder of home for Mat

Ryan.

"It's just like Central Coast Stadium," he says of the foliage that also lends Central Coast Mariners' home stadium a tropical air, but in so many other ways Gosford could not be any further from the young goalkeeper's current life.

The last two years have been a whirlwind ride for the latest in a long line of top class Australian goalkeepers as Ryan follows in the footsteps of Mark Bosnich and Mark Schwarzer onto the biggest European stage.

It was only in mid-2013 that the 23-year-old was still playing in the A-League for Central Coast, impressing with his professionalism and agility and being tipped for the top.

By the summer of 2015 he had completed a two-year stint with Belgium's Club Brugge, graduated to become Australia's number one, played at the FIFA World Cup, was named the Best Goalkeeper after winning the AFC Asian Cup on home soil and transferred to Spain's Primera Liga, joining six-time Spanish

champions Valencia.

"I'm just enjoying the ride," says Ryan, who turned 23 in April, as he reflects on his astonishing ascent. "Looking back and realising that it was just only over two years ago that I was in Gosford, or finishing up there, and now I'm here. It goes quick. Life goes quick."

While Ryan's rise has been rapid, the rate at which he has had to learn has been equally challenging; from the A-League to La Liga is a considerable jump, but he has handled every obstacle so far with aplomb.

It was Club Brugge who offered him his first experience of life as a professional overseas in July 2013, but it was the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil last summer that he was thrust into the harshest of spotlights as Australia's number one on the biggest stage of all.

With Socceroos' coach Ange Postecoglou rebuilding the team in the full glare of the global game, and with one eye on the hosting of the AFC Asian Cup, it was a tough test, but one from which Ryan – and many others – emerged stronger.

"For me, it was the biggest learning curve in my career," says Ryan of his stint in Brazil. "I learned a lot. In hindsight, I approached the tournament and the games not backing my own ability, the ability that had got me into that situation.

"I was thinking: 'I'm coming up against him and he's good enough to put it there, or there' and more often than not if I relied on my instincts I reckon I would have had a bigger chance of doing well in that action or with that shot on goal. I thought that I over analysed things too much when I needed to relax and play my own natural game. But it was my first time at that level.

"You can say I've never played at a World Cup before, but I've played football before. OK, I've not played at that level but I play the game as a professional at a decent standard so it's not like I'm going in blindfolded, but it really is a whole different level.

"Not only myself, but the Socceroos as a team, we learned a lot because the tiniest little error we were getting punished for and I hadn't witnessed anything like that anywhere I'd been. At that level it's all they need, that little window and they punish you."

"So, for me, the World Cup has by far been the biggest learning curve and it's taught me a lot about myself."

"Ange only had the team for a minimal amount of time before the World Cup and the first thing he wanted to instill was to have no fear with who you are playing against. That was probably the biggest part of his character that stands out of his personality from my perspective."



"All the facts were there, all the excuses were that we had only been together a short amount of time, we were young players and all this, but we didn't want to have a bar of that. He just kept highlighting: it's the World Cup, how often are you going to play in it, you can never take playing for your country for granted and you have to go out and play every game like it's going to be your last.

"You never know, tomorrow you can twist your ankle and whatever. He's very big on motivational speeches in order to get us up for our games mentally and I've never met anyone better, to be honest."

Learning lessons on and off the pitch has been the order of the last few years for Ryan and moving to Brugge in mid-2013 was the perfect way to prepare for life as a professional footballer; far from home and focused principally on the daily grind of competing at a higher level, he quickly grew into an exceptional shot-stopper.

He was named the Belgian league's top goalkeeper in both of his seasons in Brugge, and his presence between the posts soon had some of Europe's top clubs monitoring his progress. But there was still more to be learned, and quickly.

"It was a massive eye opener, a massive shock," he says of his move to Belgium. "I probably didn't enjoy life off the field until after

Far Left AFC
Champions League 2012

Left AFC
Champions League 2013

Above Belgian League
Goalkeeper of the Year 2014

Right Best Goalkeeper
AFC Asian Cup 2015

seven or eight months.

"I had a bit of a naïve mindset. I didn't want to go there and be replacing my friends from back home with other friends, and there's a different mentality with the people here in Europe and the other players. The first seven months was me training and going home and doing nothing.

"When I arrived, the first day there I unpacked my bag and once I was unpacked I was thinking: 'What can I do now?' I can't call my mates, can't call my family, I can't get them to come over or meet up. Not knowing where anything was. It sort of hit me. It was a big shock, but I always found the thing I went back to was if the football was going well I was happy. That's always been the case and if it's going well then everything else is worth it.

"When I first went there for the first two or three weeks I had the feeling I wasn't going to play because they had the other goalkeeper there and everyone knew I was the new kid on the block and in countries where English isn't the first language they were, without intentionally meaning to be, very forward with

what they're saying.

"They were saying little things like the other keeper had done well at the end of the last season and there was a feeling I wasn't going to play. I had always gone there with the attitude that I wanted to play, but then he picked up an injury before the season and I had played a few trial games in a row and I never missed a game after that.

"It all fell into place and although I was always thinking about the life I could have had back in Australia with friends and family, at the same time what I'm experiencing here couldn't have been possible without taking that step. You contemplate, but at the same time I'm loving what I'm doing.

"Being in Europe, one of the biggest things they talk about going from Australia is the amount of games you play in a season. The first season in Brugge we were knocked out of the cup early and out of Europe in the qualification stage so we didn't make either. I think we played maybe 43 games that year, which is still probably around 10 more than in Australia, so it was a little bit of a step up.

"But last year I played 68 in total, with the international games as well, and for me that was a big learning curve as well. I've always had the mentality, being Australian, to work hard and if you don't work hard you get self conscious and thinking that if I make a



mistake on the weekend it's because I didn't work hard during the week.

"I'm a bit like that, and towards the end of last season I was picking up little injuries and struggling to sleep and I realised I had to learn that I needed to turn the training down a little bit because the matches are the most important thing."

"Brugge had given me the opportunity to play in the Europa League, a big competition, and we made it to the quarter-finals and I played against some good teams. The dream was to play in the UEFA Champions League and the Europa League follows the same format, travelling midweek and planes everywhere, so they gave me a lot of experience and they allowed me to make a name for myself."

"They understand the league that they are that they give a lot of young guys a go hoping that the bigger leagues, the bigger fish come circling and they pay a few million for their players. That's how they survive in Belgium."

Rumours had circulated for some time that Ryan would only be with Brugge temporarily and, after speculation linking him with a move to England and elsewhere, he was eventually on his way to Spain, signing a six-year contract with Valencia in late July.

Los Che had finished fourth in the previous

season but, with number one goalkeeper Diego Alves sidelined due to a knee injury until later in the year, Ryan was handed an immediate opportunity to stake his claim to the long-term position between the posts.

He was a member of the team that qualified for the group stage of the UEFA Champions League – defeating Monaco over two legs – before making his league debut in a 1-1 draw against Deportivo La Coruna before a knee injury ruled him out for the following month.

It was a cruel blow to his fledgling career, but after minor surgery on the meniscus in his right knee, Ryan has at least been able to devote more time to overcoming one of the new challenges he faces in Spain.

"It's been challenging in the beginning, but that's always normal coming some place new and adjusting," he says. "This time now, English isn't as common, so that's another challenge with the language, but I've always been excited about learning another language and Spanish was the language that I had in mind that I'd like to learn. So I'm just getting stuck into that with a bit of time off the pitch."

"On the pitch, it was going alright. I was enjoying it. We had made the UEFA Champions League and I was part of that and it was nice to be part of that and unfortunately the injury happened three games in, but I'm just working hard on getting fit."

His unveiling at the club's famous – and imposing – Mestalla Stadium left him impressed, but not as much as the sheer number of fans on the narrow streets around the stadium in the build-up to the meeting with Monaco.

"When I first walked out and looked at the stadium, I thought: 'This is massive!'" he says. "We played Roma there (in a pre-season friendly) and it was a good atmosphere, but these days I'm too focused on the game to really take it all in."

"But the thing that got me before the Monaco game, when we turned up on the bus there were 10,000 people in the square outside the stadium when the bus pulled up. That's when you recognise that you're at a big club and they're going off their heads and cheering and whatnot. You're not so entrenched in the game, so you get to witness that and you see and you take it in more and that for me was like: Wow! It was massive."

Ryan's signing is the latest in a number of new arrivals at the Mestalla as Portuguese coach Nuno Espírito Santo and Singaporean owner Peter Lim attempt to turn the club back into one of the powerhouses of Spanish football.

Financial issues had seen Valencia fall short of the status they held at the turn of



Left Playing in UEFA Champions League 2015 for Valencia

the millennium when, after back-to-back appearances in the UEFA Champions League final in 2000 and 2001, they won the 2002 and 2004 La Liga titles and the UEFA Cup in 2004.

But as the money ran out due, in part, to Spain's financial crisis, Valencia were forced to sell their best players, slipping down the standings in the process. Lim's arrival in the summer of 2014, however, has steadied the club and last season's fourth-place finish has many in Valencia dreaming of a return to the big time.

Qualification for the group stage of the UEFA Champions League has added to that sense and with a squad featuring a blend of youth and experience, Ryan is hopeful he and his new team mates can make an impact both now and in the future.

"It's maybe the same as where we were with the national team," he says. "We're building for something, but also not taking for granted any game from now on in. There's no reason why, off the back of what the team did last year, going into this year that they can't build on that."

"Atletico Madrid won the league a few years ago and I'll bet going into the year no one would have ever picked that. If they can do it,

Above AFC Asian Cup 2015

why can't a club like Valencia?

"I know I was made well aware when coming here and signing of the direction the club wants to go to and I'm sure everyone else has been made well aware of that as well. We're at that stage at the start of the year with a couple of new faces in the team and we're building towards something."

"But it's one thing to say it, and another thing to do it. Everyone's bought into it and we're working hard. There are a lot of fresh young faces in the team and hopefully we can adapt quickly and gain the experience quickly. We have some senior heads around the team, which you need, like Javi Fuego, Alvaro Negredo and these sorts of guys and hopefully they can rub off on us younger guys and we can be a team to be reckoned with not only in Europe, but also in the league."

"One of the things I've learned through Ange is that everyone is human at the end of the day. OK, they have big names but why are they better than you? On the day, if you take the right approach and play your heart out and give the absolute best you can give that's what it's down to at the end of the day and that's the approach I go with into games now. You want to test yourself and see if you can stop shots against them."

"You just take it as it comes and do your best, that's all you can do."



Mat Ryan

Nationality:

Australia

DOB:

08/04/1992

Position:

Goalkeeper

Current club:

Valencia (Spain)

Previous clubs:

Central Coast Mariners (Australia)

Club Brugge (Belgium)



FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

JAPAN'S VICTORY AT THE 2015 AFC U-19 WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP ADDED ANOTHER ACHIEVEMENT TO THE ALREADY IMPRESSIVE CV OF COACH ASAOKO TAKAKURA FOLLOWING LAST YEAR'S SUCCESS AT THE FIFA U-17 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP, BUT WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE THREE-TIME AFC WOMEN'S COACH OF THE YEAR?

By: Peter Alsop **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Getty Images







The journey to success for Asako Takakura has been a long and often arduous one. But after following up victory at the 2014 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in Costa Rica with continental glory at the 2015 AFC U-19 Women's Championship in Nanjing in August, the Fukushima native has finally etched her name into Japanese footballing folklore.

"From a young age I loved football and I was always looking for places to play," says the 47-year-old former midfielder, who won three successive AFC Women's Coach of the Year awards from 2012-2014.

"But I lived in the countryside and there wasn't a girls' team - there was very little culture for women's football at all - so I ended up joining a boys' side when I was 10 years old. At first there were no problems, but when I got to around 12, some of the boys would bully me because I was a girl who played football. But all I wanted to do was play so I decided to continue."

And it is this determination to succeed in the face of adversity that has taken the 2014 FIFA Women's Coach of the Year award nominee from being the only girl in a boys' team to becoming the driving force behind one of the

world's most successful women's sides.

"I wanted to play in a women's team, so when I was around 13 or 14 years old, I joined a club in Tokyo," says Takakura.

"It was not easy, though, because I had to travel three and a half hours there and back by train just to practice with them, not every day, but maybe once a week."

Takakura's love of the sport would go on to take her half way round the world in order to achieve what she did not think, at the time, was possible in her homeland.

"When I was young the Japan Football Association didn't invest a lot of money into women's football. There weren't enough training camps, so I would go abroad once a year to be part of such camps. I went to China and one time Italy, I would pay for it myself," says Takakura.

"It wasn't until the first Women's World Cup was held in China in 1991 that they started to put a little more money into the women's game, but even then we had to wait until around 2000 for a significant amount."

Takakura represented her country at that inaugural FIFA Women's World Cup in 1991, but the results did not make for happy reading with successive defeats to Brazil, Sweden and the USA leaving the Nadeshiko popping up their group having scored none and conceded

12.

Hosts China, the benchmark for women's football in Asia at the time, advanced to the quarter-finals before being eliminated by Sweden.

Several months earlier, Japan had hosted the AFC Women's Asian Cup, making it to the final in a campaign that included 12-0 and 10-0 victories over Malaysia and Singapore before ultimately succumbing 5-0 to China, who claimed their third successive continental crown en route to a record seven in a row.

There was a huge disparity in the women's game across Asia with China winning every AFC Women's Asian Cup Takakura was involved in between 1986 and 1999.

"When I was a player we would play against China, but they were so strong, I felt it would be impossible to ever beat them. But the Japan Football Association believed in the team, and a lot of emphasis was put on technique and tactics. Step-by-step we started to believe our collective game would be superior to China one day, so we just kept trying and trying."

Four years later, this time in Sweden, there was a marked improvement in Japan's FIFA Women's World Cup showing as the East Asians narrowly lost to Germany in their opening game before defeating Brazil and



U-19 WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP CH

going down to the hosts as they progressed to the quarter-finals.

A 4-0 loss to reigning champions the USA ensued for Japan while China finished fourth, but the progress was there for all to see.

Advancing to the knockout stage of the FIFA Women's World Cup also guaranteed that the Nadeshiko qualified for the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

"The World Cup in Sweden was the qualifying competition for the Olympics, and we made it to the last eight so we were one of the teams to go through," says Takakura.

"We were in a tough group with Germany, Brazil and Norway so we were expecting it to be difficult, but we were improving at the time so to lose all three was very disappointing."

After eventually retiring from playing in 2004, Takakura took up her first coaching role in 2008 as coach of the Japan Women's U-13 team.

"When I played at Yomiuri Beleza the coach spoke about the importance of technique," says Takakura. "After that, I studied my team-mates and opponents very carefully during games in order to improve. I started to think about technique a lot."

Further stints within the Japan Football Association followed before she was appointed coach of Japan's U-16 women's team, with whom she won the AFC U-16 Women's

Far Left & Top Left AFC Women's Asian Cup 1999

Bottom Left AFC Annual Awards 2013

Left FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2014

Top Left AFC Annual Awards 2014

Top Right & Above AFC U-19 Women's Championship 2015

Championship in 2011 and 2013.

The second success, secured after edging out DPR Korea 6-5 on penalties following a 1-1 draw after extra-time, earned a place at the 2014 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in Costa Rica and subsequent 2-0 victory over Spain in the final.

And of that triumphant squad, 10 also represented the Young Nadeshiko at the 2015 AFC U-19 Women's Championship as Japan defeated DPR Korea 4-2 on penalties in the final following a goalless draw to ensure qualification for the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup next year.

That victory followed in the footsteps of their senior counterparts, who won the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup.

"After 2011, football became the most popular sport for women in Japan," says Takakura.

"If the senior team wins, they have greater influence over the people as they are in the

news, commercials and advertisements, so girls become more interested in playing. And now more want to play, the most important thing is to follow a development system to ensure the game continues to progress."

And this is something, Takakura believes, other teams in Asia must also adopt if they want to improve in the way the East Asian teams have in recent years.

"As I said, when I was a player I felt it was impossible to catch China, but we kept believing in our style," she says.

"The football associations in each country are, of course, important, and if they keep believing in themselves and focusing on youth development, anything is achievable."

"I have a lot of friends in other countries who were players, and we sometimes talk about women's football. None of us expected such a big improvement; I didn't think it would happen in my lifetime."

And as for the route her own future will take, the Young Nadeshiko coach does not rule out one day leading the senior side, but "let's wait until after the U-20 World Cup" is the overriding response.

But whether or not this particular journey ends at the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France, Takakura has already come a long way from her rural upbringing in Fukushima.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

THE SON OF ONE OF ASIA'S GREATEST PLAYERS, KOREA REPUBLIC AND FC SEOUL DEFENDER CHA DU-RI IS SET TO HANG UP HIS BOOTS FOR GOOD IN NOVEMBER, AND AS HIS 14-YEAR CAREER COMES TO A CLOSE, HE FINALLY FEELS HE HAS STEPPED OUT OF THE SHADOW OF HIS FAMOUS FATHER.

By: Daniel Pordes Photos: Lagardère Sports/Getty Images

Cha Du-ri has had a harder time than most in living up to his father's legacy. Korea Republic's all-time leading scorer with over 50 goals from more than 120 international matches; winner of two UEFA Cups; and holder of a number of Bundesliga records, Cha Bum-kun is hailed far and wide as one of Asia's greatest ever players.

A 14-year career as a professional that is due to conclude this year has brought its

own accolades to Cha with a CV that is impressive in its own right: 2015 AFC Asian Cup finalist, 2013 AFC Champions League finalist, 2011 AFC Asian Cup third place, not to mention appearing in the 2002 and 2010 FIFA World Cups.

"Sometimes I hated my father. What he had achieved was such a big wall in front of me in terms of career," says Cha, now 35 years old and currently plying his trade for FC Seoul.

"My father was always my goal as a football player; I wanted to become great like him."







Cha Bum-kun made his mark on the footballing world in Germany, with hugely successful spells at both Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayer Leverkusen, where he was affectionately known as "Cha Boom" due to his pace and thunderous ball striking ability, and it was there, too, that on 25 July 1980, Cha was born.

Although too young to remember his father's spell at Frankfurt that ended with a transfer in 1983 to Leverkusen, Cha can still recall his days growing up in West Germany where his father was the talk of the town for his exploits in the red and black of Bayer from 1983 to 1989.

"My Mondays at school were very much dependent on how my father did over the weekend. If he played well, I felt really proud and was maybe a little boastful in class; but if he didn't do great, then I was a bit quieter and the atmosphere was quite different," says Cha.

"In those days, there were no games consoles or internet like there is today, so for young kids in Germany, football was really the main entertainment and all we talked about – it was every youngster's dream to become a footballer.

"Everywhere my family went, a lot of people welcomed us and gave me such a positive impression that I remember thinking

then that if you become a football player you will get this kind of welcome wherever you go."

One place the young Cha was unwelcome, though, was in the stands at the Ulrich Haberland Stadion, where his mother, Oh Eun-mi, believed the child would be a distraction for his father.

And so, Cha had to make do with watching the matches on television, including seeing his father score a crucial header for Leverkusen in the 1988 UEFA Cup final second leg as the Bundesliga side went on to lift the continental title.

In 1991, with Cha Bum-kun retired from playing, and offered a job as manager of K-League side Ulsan Hyundai, the family left Germany for Korea where they had to reacclimatise to life in Asia.

Already intent on following in his father's footsteps as a professional footballer, Cha worked his way through school teams before being accepted at Seoul's Korea University in 1999. There, already hinting at possessing the power of his father as a physically imposing forward, Cha caught the attention of national team coach Guus Hiddink and at 21 years old, still an amateur, he made his Korea debut in a friendly against Senegal in November 2001.

Cha remained in Hiddink's plans and when the squad for the 2002 FIFA World Cup jointly hosted by Japan and Korea was announced,

he was named among the Dutchman's 23.

"I was really surprised to be called up for the national team in that era. Back then everyone felt you must first go to university and graduate before playing professionally, so it was really sensational for a player like me who hadn't yet graduated to be called up," says Cha.

"The coach told me that he needed me because I was really fast and physically well-built. When the match had gone on for a while and people are getting tired, I could be a different option from the bench.

"I was obviously happy about the selection, but simultaneously there was a lot of controversy about it because I had never played for the youth national team and had little international exposure. But as a result of all this prejudice, I saw it as a challenge to overcome."

Although Cha played just a late cameo in Korea's victorious opener against Poland, he saw action against Italy in the Taeguk Warriors' famous extra-time win in the Round of 16 before making his first start in the 1-0 loss to Germany in the semi-final, as well as coming off the bench against Turkey in the third place play-off.

"It was a dream to play in the World Cup in Korea. At the time, I didn't have much chance to really think about the matches and



the World Cup itself, I just tried to do my best each time I got a chance to play," says Cha.

"After the World Cup, it was then that a lot of players realised how crazy it all was; how much attention there was on us, and how people followed us around. I have no memory of paying for any meals in restaurants!"

Following the success at home, Cha returned to Germany with a move to Leverkusen, and high on self-belief after his FIFA World Cup experience, he looked to take the next path in his footballing journey.

"I was young and confident back then and even as a youngster in Korea, I always thought I'd return to Germany and play in the Bundesliga, so I felt no pressure that my father had been a famous player at Leverkusen," says Cha, who was first sent on loan to Arminia Bielefeld before a loan spell at another of his father's former clubs, Frankfurt.

"But as time passed at Leverkusen – one year became three years – reality began to sink in and I realised how great a player my father was, how hard it was to live up to what he'd done at the club, and it began to weigh me down."

National team duties also brought little solace as a quarter-final exit to Iran at the 2004 AFC Asian Cup in China proved a disappointment for a team that two years earlier had finished fourth at the FIFA World

Far Top Left FIFA World Cup 2002

Far Bottom Left League champions with Celtic in 2012

Top Left AFC Asian Cup 2011

Left AFC Asian Cup 2015

Bottom Left AFC Champions League 2014

Above AFC Champions League 2015

Cup.

Having failed to break into the Leverkusen first team, Cha moved permanently to Frankfurt and it was there, under the advice of coach Friedhelm Funkel, that he eventually gave up trying to be the free-scoring forward his father had been and switched to right-back ahead of the 2005/06 season.

"As I wasn't scoring goals, I was under a lot of pressure. I was suffering a bad goal drought and in each game I felt so tense that I couldn't play at my full capacity," he says.

"Funkel suggested I move to right-back and harness my speed and physical attributes. The pressure lifted immensely and I could begin to play with all my ability."

Cha, however, missed out on Korea's 2006 FIFA World Cup squad, a source of particular frustration due to his presence in the host country, and subsequent spells at Mainz and German second division side TuS Koblenz failed to bring the success he craved, as well as an extended period away from the national

team which saw him miss the 2007 AFC Asian Cup where Korea would go on to finish third.

A move to newly promoted SC Freiburg ahead of the 2009/10 season proved more fruitful though, and his consistent form there saw him recalled to the Korea squad ahead of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, where he starred for his nation before they lost to Uruguay in the last 16 of the tournament.

Cha's performances in South Africa earned him a move to Scotland's Celtic, where he would join up with countryman Ki Sung-yueng in Glasgow.

A cult hero at Celtic Park, Cha played two seasons and was part of the side that lifted the Scottish Cup in 2011 and the league championship in 2012.

"I had so much fun in Scotland," he says. "Celtic is a big team and Celtic Park is a beautiful stadium – it was such an honour for me to play there as a football player and great to play there with Ki Sung-yueng."

"In one match against St. Johnstone, in December 2010, both me and Ki Sung-yueng scored late goals to make the score 2-0 – I think it's the first and maybe last game that two Koreans will score at Celtic Park for Celtic, from time to time we still talk about this match."



At the heart of the image

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Cha Du-ri

Nationality:
Korea Republic

DOB:
25/07/1980

Position:
Defender

Current club:
FC Seoul (Korea Republic)

Previous clubs:
Bayer Leverkusen
Arminia Bielefeld
Eintracht Frankfurt
Mainz 05
TuS Koblenz
SC Freiburg
(All Germany)
Celtic (Scotland)
Fortuna Dusseldorf (Germany)

Cha and Ki went on to play every match of Korea's 2011 AFC Asian Cup campaign in a side that melded the 2002 FIFA World Cup experience of Park Ji-sung, Lee Young-pyo and Cha with young talents in Ki, Ji Dong-won and tournament top scorer Koo Ja-cheol; as well as giving future star Son Heung-min a first taste of international competition.

"The 2011 AFC Asian Cup side in Qatar was the best team I've ever played in, both tactically and in terms of personnel," says Cha.

"There were younger players around, so I was there as more of a role model and could read and see the games a lot better from a tactical point of view – I was much more mature as a football player.

"So when we lost the semi-final against Japan on penalties, it was one of the most disappointing games ever for me."

Cha's time at Celtic ended in June 2012 and he returned to Germany with Fortuna Dusseldorf.

But disillusioned with how the move panned out, Cha began to consider an early retirement before a discussion with close-friend and former 2002 FIFA World Cup room-mate Choi Yong-soo, the coach at FC Seoul, resulted in his return to the Korean

Above With father
Cha Bum-kun in March 2015

Below AFC
Champions League 2015

capital in March 2013 on a two-year deal.

The switch of continents proved beneficial for Cha and he helped FC Seoul reach the final of



the 2013 AFC Champions League where they finished as runners-up to China's Guangzhou Evergrande, as well as reaching the semi-finals of the continental club championship the following year.

A re-energized Cha then made the squad for

Uli Stielike's Korea at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup after being left out of the 2014 FIFA World Cup side, and he rolled back the years to demonstrate the power and pace down the flanks that had earned him the nickname 'Chaminator' as he helped his country to the final, only losing to hosts Australia after extra-time.

The continental tournament proved to be the swansong for Chai in his nation's colours, and in March he played his last game in a friendly against New Zealand with his father joining him at half-time in a special ceremony to commemorate his career.

"In Korea, playing as a national player is such a burden. When you do well there is a lot of love, but when you do badly there is a lot of criticism. But I feel so happy that I am able to retire with the fans love," says Cha, who is expected to retire from the game entirely at the end of the current K-League Classic season.

"It is thanks to my friend Choi Yong-soo and FC Seoul that I was able to be selected for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup and finish my international career in this great way.

"Now I can look back on my career and I feel happy that me and my father played as national players for Korea, and that we both



A DIFFERENT WORLD

GUAM HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN THE SURPRISE PACKAGE OF THE CURRENT JOINT QUALIFIERS FOR THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP AND 2019 AFC ASIAN CUP, WITH A 19-0 DEFEAT BY IRAN 15 YEARS AGO A DISTANT MEMORY FOR THE ISLAND NATION.

By: Scott McIntyre **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Scott McIntyre







Left Against Iran
in September 2015

Above At home to Oman
in September 2015

Below Richard Lai

eant against the whir and heat of a drinks vending machine, Roy Abril stood sweating in the humid night air at Guam's National Training Centre recalling an evening 15 years ago that may as well have come from a different lifetime.

"It was insurmountable odds that we faced, travelling to Iran, as a team of amateurs up against a side full of stars that played at big clubs both in Iran and in Europe," says Abril.

"We'd all taken time off study or jobs – I was working at a local TV station – and back then there was only one rocky field to play on and no lights; it's like a different world these days."

Abril, now into his 40s and still playing in the local masters league, was the full-back that day in November 2000 as Iran won 19-0 after scoring six goals over a 12 minute period midway through the second half of the qualifier for the 2002 FIFA World Cup, and which came to define football in Guam for the better part of a decade.

It was the first time the island nation had

1975

Guam Football Association Founded

attempted to qualify for a FIFA World Cup, and then just two days later suffering a 16-0 defeat to Tajikistan, it was also the last until the start of the current campaign.

To outsiders, Guam were expected to repeat those results, if not perhaps the same scorelines, on the road to the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

But in a sign of recent progress, Guam were seeded directly into the second round of the joint qualifiers for Russia and the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, where they were drawn against Iran, 2009 Gulf Cup champions Oman as well as India and Turkmenistan.

Nevermind the recent feats of Iran at the FIFA World Cup, those four nations combined have appeared in a total of 20 AFC Asian Cups, while Guam lost all three games to Chinese Taipei, Vietnam and Korea

19-0

Guam lost to Iran in November 2000

Republic during the qualifiers for the 2006 continental tournament.

All indications were that the side, known as the Matao, would struggle to pick up enough points to rise from the foot of Group D, but to those on the inside, there was no doubt that this was a new-look team ready to confound the doubters.

But yet not even the most optimistic fan could have predicted that at the halfway point of the second round they would be joint top with Iran and Oman, having chalked up impressive home wins against Turkmenistan



and India as well as recording a scoreless draw against Oman despite losing 6-0 in Iran.

"We came in with no outside expectations to succeed and people gave us no respect, but now they can see after four matches we're still at the top of the group and that is phenomenal and something which no-one has done before," says Guam Football Association President Richard Lai.

"Football belongs to every corner of the world, to everyone, and if anyone still has the mentality it belongs only to the big countries then they should not stay in football."

Fighting words, perhaps, but what Guam have done is light a fuse of belief for other developing nations in Asia that with good leadership, an investment in youth



Below
Gary White



Above Roy Abril
Left Against
India June 2015

programmes and infrastructure as well as a solid playing group and coaching staff, then real progress is possible.

Since Lai rose to the helm of the Guam

146

Guam's FIFA ranking as of September 2015

Football Association almost a decade ago the association has unveiled a state-of-the-art training and administrative headquarters, seen junior playing numbers rise to the point where football is now the most popular sport on the island, and have witnessed the senior men's

team rise to an all-time high of 146 on the FIFA rankings table.

Much of the on-field success is down to the appointment, in 2012, of English coach Gary White.

One of the first things he did upon his appointment was restore a sense of pride, insisting that the national anthem is sung before every training session or match, immediately after the entire squad performs a traditional pledge known as the 'Inifresi.'

Somewhere between a hymn to their homeland and a Haka style war-cry, the 'Inifresi' is chanted in the island's native Chamorro tongue and is already becoming

one of the most unique sights and sounds amongst Asian football.

"What I wanted to do is bring back belief to a side that had perhaps lost a little of it, to make sure the players remembered where they came from and what they are playing for," says White.

"You see that now where we played Oman in our new home kit, which is designed using traditional Chamorro colours, all the players really wanted something that reflected their culture.

"We may be a small island, but we have thousands of years of history and a fighting mentality that I want the squad to embody."



The tiny village of Yona stands more than 100 metres above sea level and is ringed by mountains on all sides, and it is also the secluded training base for the Matao's FIFA World Cup matches.

The drive from Yona down to the tourist strips that fringe the coastline is a reminder of both what Guam used to be and what it is becoming with symbols of modern American consumerist culture set amongst religious buildings of varying belief and persuasion.

The island's football team is a similar mix of character and origin; some born on the island, some raised there before pursuing college careers in the United States, and some with their links through either residency or lineage.

"Everyone in my team is from Guam, we are all one, there is absolutely no difference whether you were born here or not, we are all of the same culture and spirit," adds White.

That's a belief shared by the most iconic name in Guamanian football, record caps holder and leading scorer Jason Cunliffe.

"You can see when the players come in from their clubs and situations that there's a real happiness and joy and that we really love being around each other," says Cunliffe.

"There's no separation or division, it's just us showing the world what we can do."

While Cunliffe is one of the veterans of the side, there is an exciting mix of experience and youth that has allowed the Matao to start the campaign so impressively with a 1-0 win over Turkmenistan and a 2-1 defeat of India.

Those maiden home FIFA World Cup qualifiers were also the first time the Guam Football Association had sold tickets to a match on the island.

LA Galaxy's AJ DeLaGarza is the team's headline attraction, with White working overtime to convince the defender to pledge

160,000

Guam's population

his allegiance to Guam after previously earning several friendly caps for the USA.

Fellow defender/midfielder Brandon McDonald has recently moved to Thailand, while there are a core group of players in the lower tiers of the American system and college set-ups that have added both class and determination to the squad.

Yet, it is not always easy; several of the squad are currently between clubs and the sacrifices they make are not always easy on family or financial budgets.

None of the local players are full-time with even Cunliffe working days at a bank, while Seattle-based goalkeeper Doug Herrick works nightshifts at a cornea-transplant organisation while training when he clocks off.

The Japan Football Association have also been strong supporters of football on the island for more than a decade with current Vice President Kohzo Tashima the first FIFA instructor to visit Guam in the late 1990s.

"Some of the talent in this squad is good enough to play at any level in Asia, and what you've seen from the whole group across these matches is that the players are capable of adapting tactically to a range of situations and are technically good enough to match it with some of the region's best," says White.

That, in no small part, is down to White, a man who had a similar Midas touch during his time in charge of CONCACAF nations British Virgin Island and Bahamas.

While the results have been impressive so too has the way the side has played and the tactical research the 41-year-old has done into breaking down his opponents.

Nowhere was this in evidence more so than in the draw with Oman where the side looked comfortable in possession and showed a tactical maturity to be able to vary the tempo of the match as required.

It is little wonder that White, who travelled to Japan after the draw with Oman to complete the Japan Football Association's highest coaching qualification, is being tracked by several leading club and national sides across Asia – but this is more than a story about just individuals.

"Every time I come into camp we are improving, better players are coming, better staff are coming and we see no reason to stop believing in what we can do," says LA Galaxy man DeLaGarza. "We want to keep this journey going and shock the world even more than we already have."



Left Against India June 2015

Below & Right Against Iran in September 2015



Above Gary White and Jason Cunliffe with Oman coach Paul Le Guen and goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi

Q&A



Guam Football Association President Richard Lai

How much of a challenge has it been to lift Guam to their current position?

When I first started we were like a baby just starting to crawl, but you see how far we've come. I remember watching those results like the loss against Iran and it was the most heart-breaking moment of my life. People would laugh at us in the stadium and with every goal it was like someone was twisting a knife into my heart but I knew, I just knew, we would grow.

Do you still see the side as an underdog story?

I remember first meeting with Junji Ogura (current Japan Football Association Honorary President) and he said we need you to raise the standard from the bottom then the middle pushes the top and all of Asia benefits from this. Then in Asia we push the whole world. But the success of the Matao didn't happen yesterday, it's been 12 years and all the help I've received I want to repay 10 times over.

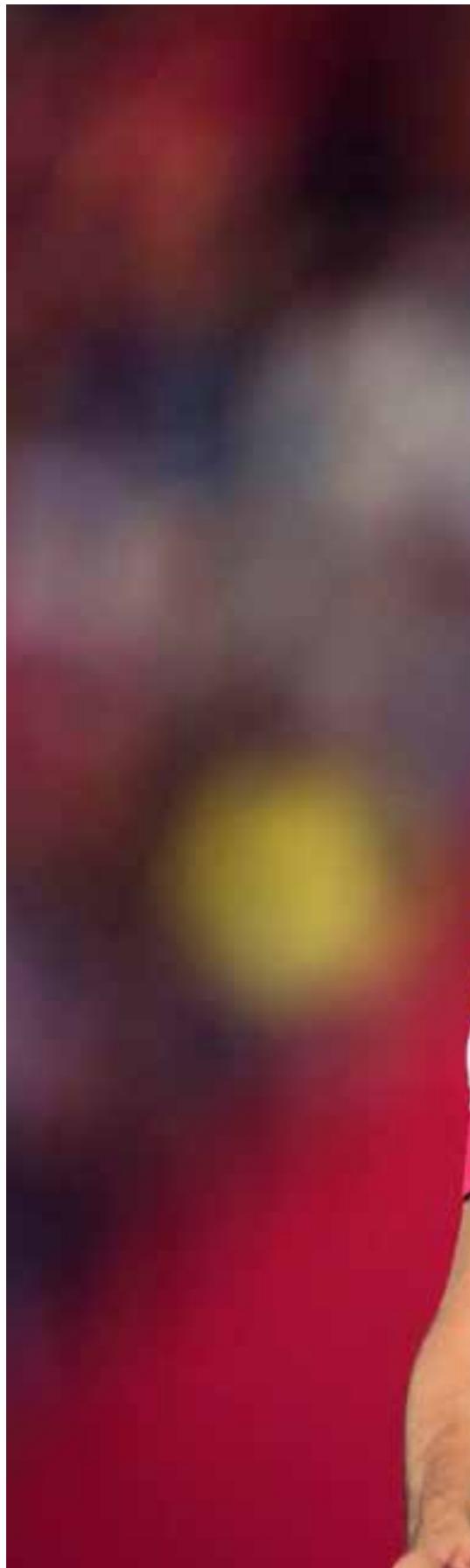
How far can Guam go over the next decade?

We have a very strong hope and belief in our team; we've got fantastic recent results and a great coach and players, but I hope this 12 year story can inspire the whole of Guam. When I first took over as President I thought that soccer was just a game of 11 people kicking a ball to enjoy. But then I realised just how big football was that I felt like a little ant on the ground - in terms of population we have so few people on Guam and we still only have an amateur league.

TIME TO SHINE

AFTER A DISAPPOINTING 2015 AFC ASIAN CUP CAMPAIGN, QATAR CAPTAIN HASAN AL HAYDOS IS LOOKING TO DRIVE THE GULF CUP CHAMPIONS TO GREATER SUCCESS IN THE JOINT QUALIFIERS FOR THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP AND 2019 AFC ASIAN CUP, A CAMPAIGN WHICH THE FORWARD INSISTS COULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT EVER FOR THE 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP HOSTS.

By: Daniel Pordes **Photos:** Lagardère Sports







The 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia was supposed to be the coming out party for Qatar captain Hasan Al Haydos and his team-mates in the national team, instead, it turned into a nightmare.

In the lead up to the

continental showpiece in January, Qatar went on a run of 12 games with just one defeat after Algerian coach Djamel Belmadi took over in March 2014; a streak that culminated in the Gulf Cup title last November and included the scalps of Australia, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and DPR Korea.

One of the form sides ahead of their first match in Canberra against the United Arab Emirates, confidence was high amongst the Qatari camp with many in the media having them pegged as dark horses for the title.

"We were working very well under Djamel Belmadi and he found the rhythm for us as a team. We had played excellently under him in 2014 and ended the year by deservedly winning the Gulf Cup," says 24-year-old Haydos, who plies his trade for Doha-based Al Sadd, who he helped win the 2011 AFC Champions League title.

"To be the Gulf Cup champions gave us great confidence in ourselves ahead of the

AFC Asian Cup, but this confidence became our disadvantage and turned against us."

The opening half hour at Canberra Stadium had gone according to plan with former AFC Player of the Year and Al Haydos' Al Sadd team-mate Khalfan Ibrahim on target after 22 minutes to put Qatar ahead with a leaping volley.

But a defensive mix-up in the Qatar backline allowed Emirati striker Ahmed Khalil to level the scores eight minutes before half-time, and the UAE would net three times more in the second period to cruise home with a 4-1 win.

And four days later, a sumptuous Sardar Azmoun strike in the second half in Sydney was enough for Iran as Qatar suffered back-to-back defeats for the first time since March 2013.

With the UAE also defeating Bahrain 2-1 in Canberra, the result meant that Belmadi's side were eliminated from the AFC Asian Cup with a game to spare.

Even a consolation point was beyond Qatar as Sayed Ahmed's goal eight minutes from time gave Bahrain a 2-1 win and third place in the group, despite Al Haydos earlier netting to cancel out Sayed Dhiya's first half opener.

"To be honest, if you ask any of the team what was the reason for our performance in

the AFC Asian Cup, we still don't know," says Al Haydos, who started all three games for Qatar in Australia.

"We had the confidence of being the Gulf champions, Djamel Belmadi worked very hard with us ahead of the tournament, and we thought we could go very far.

"Against the UAE we made one individual mistake after another. In the Iran game we actually had our best performance, but because of an individual mistake we lost again. It was the same against Bahrain, which was really disappointing as we wanted to win at least one game in the competition."

Al Haydos does at least have one positive memory from the tournament as after the Iran game, opposition coach Carlos Queiroz requested the player's shirt as a keepsake and lauded his play and effort on the field.

Qatar, though, were not allowed too much time to lick their wounds with the joint qualifiers for the 2018 FIFA World Cup and 2019 AFC Asian Cup beginning just five months later under recently appointed coach Jose Carreno.

"We want to change the image we showed the spectators at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia and now it's our chance," says Al Haydos, with Qatar having began the second round of qualifiers with wins over the Maldives, Bhutan and Hong Kong to top Group C after



Hasan Al Haydos

Nationality:

Qatar

DOB:

11/12/1980

Position:

Forward

Current club:

Al Sadd
(Qatar)

Far Top Left AFC
Champions League 2015

Top Left AFC
Asian Cup 2015

Bottom Left AFC
Champions League 2011

Above Against Hong Kong
in September 2015

September's round of fixtures.

"It's the chance for us, as young players, to show that we have the capability and skills and show how Qatar is improving in our development as a footballing nation. We also have older players who maybe won't be with the team in the future, so this is also a competition for them to do their best in.

"I have the confidence in my team-mates that we can achieve great things. We have shown before we can beat any team in Asia, for example we beat Australia in Doha last year. So my team-mates can show and do better in the upcoming qualifying games.

"We know it's really important for us to show that we have a good team and that we can qualify for the World Cup. The next World Cup after 2018 will be in our home, so we have to show that we are able to qualify. I believe this is one of the most important qualifying campaigns Qatar has ever faced."

And with the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar looming ever nearer on the horizon, the Aspire Academy, set up in Doha in 2004, is also starting to bear fruit for the national team.

The academy is tasked with the goal of

finding and developing the best young male Qatari athletes, while also providing secondary school education, and combines talent centres, feeder groups, student-athlete scholarships and opportunities to play overseas.

The likes of attacking full-back Abdelkarim Hassan and 18-year-old Akram Afif, who starred in Qatar's 2014 AFC U-19 Championship-winning team, are Aspire graduates staking claims to places in the senior side with the new generation set to play a key role in the national side in the future.

"It's really important to have players like Abdelkarim and Afif from Aspire because the way they think and the way they trained at Aspire give us advantages to have great and skilful players in the team," says Al Haydos, who himself came up through the more conventional academy system at Al Sadd.

"There is a big difference in these players from the previous generation as a lot of this is to do with the academic side they've been through, that is really important. This affects the way they see the game and their discipline in terms of mentality: from the way they are

on time, the way they eat, the way they sleep everything."

In his club football, meanwhile, Al Haydos will be looking to help Al Sadd improve on their runners-up finish in the Qatar Stars League last season, as well progressing in the 2016 AFC Champions League.

This year Al Sadd, who signed former Barcelona and Spain midfielder Xavi Hernandez in the summer, were eliminated in the last 16 of the continental tournament by local rivals and Qatari league champions Lekhwiya.

"We want to win everything and Xavi does, too. He is starving for trophies. He keeps telling us we have to win everything this season and keeps motivating us and in response I'm sure all the players will give everything this year," says Al Haydos, who was named Qatar Footballer of the Year last season.

"We'll be aiming to get to next year's AFC Champions League final again too, and why not the trophy? That is always our main aim in the AFC Champions League."

"As a player, the 2011 AFC Champions League title was the most important trophy I have ever won, but if I can get to the World Cup in Russia, it might become the second best thing."



CLUB ON THE RISE

TAJIKISTAN'S FC ISTIKLOL HAVE REACHED THE SEMI-FINALS ON THEIR AFC CUP DEBUT, AND WITH AN ACADEMY STRUCTURE ALREADY IN PLACE TO ENSURE CONTINUED PROGRESS, A PLACE IN THE AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE IS ALREADY ON THE RADAR.

By: Andrew Mullen Photos: Lagardère Sports





ASROROV

2



With the lofty goal of one day playing in the AFC Champions League, Tajikistan's FC Istiklol are certainly proving their potential having progressed from perennial domestic champions to AFC President's Cup winners and now to genuine AFC Cup contenders in just a few short years.

And when you consider all this has been achieved just eight years after winning the second tier title in Tajikistan, the achievements of the club from the country's capital Dushanbe are even more remarkable.

Founded in 2007 with their name meaning independence in Tajik, the club quickly grew under the guidance of president Shohruh Saidov with a strong emphasis placed on youth development.

And having won the second division title in 2008, Istiklol finished fourth in their debut season in the top-flight and won the Tajik Cup.

Istiklol's team at the time contained several players who had helped Tajikistan finish third at the 2006 AFC U-16 Championship and then

went on to reach the Round of 16 at the following year's FIFA U-17 World Cup, with many remaining at the club to this day.

Tajikistan beat the USA 4-3 in the group stage of the FIFA U-17 World Cup thanks to goals from current Istiklol duo Fathullo Fathulloev and Nuriddin Davronov, who also scored in the last 16 defeat by Peru on penalties following a 1-1 draw after extra-time.

"It is a very young club. Just before the president of the club started the team his friends were playing for a team and they played in the first league in Dushanbe," says current Istiklol team manager and former player Shakhzod Sulaymonov, who was part of the 2012 AFC President's Cup winning team having also featured for Tajikistan at the 2007 FIFA U-17 World Cup in Korea Republic.

"In 2008 they won the second division and were promoted and so the next year they played in the top league for the first time, finished fourth and won the Tajik Cup.

"After that, the president of the club decided to make them a professional club as he has a passion for football.

"This team contained a lot of players from the 2007 World Cup team and I was one of them. A lot of the players from this team are still in the team now."

The league and cup double soon followed in 2010 and with it qualification for the 2011 AFC President's Cup, the third-tier continental competition sitting behind the AFC Champions League and the AFC Cup.

And 2011 proved to be a year to remember for Istiklol as they won the domestic treble by adding the Super Cup to successful defences of their league and cup crowns, while also progressing from the group stage of the AFC President's Cup with an unbeaten record.

The finals of the AFC President's Cup, though, proved one step too far for the young club as Istiklol crucially lost 2-0 to eventual champions Taiwan Power Company from Chinese Taipei in the group stage, with a 1-1 draw against Turkmenistan's Balkan insufficient to secure progress to the final.

The following year did see Istiklol relinquish their domestic honours after finishing third in the league and losing the cup final, but in September, continental success finally arrived.



Istiklol had earlier won May's group stage following wins over Palestine's Al Amma'i Youth Club and Balkan to earn the right to host the finals at Dushanbe Central Stadium.

The home side, who were under the guidance of Serbian coach Nikola Kavazovic, opened with a 2-0 win over two-time champions Dordoi from Kyrgyzstan before booking their place in the final against qualifying stage opponents Al Amma'i with a 6-0 win over Cambodia's Phnom Penh Crown.

And in the final, defender Davronjon Ergashev and captain Dilshod Vasiev scored a quickfire double midway through the second half as Istiklol overcame a one goal half-time

“All of Asia knew about us, we showed that Tajikistan has football with good players.”

**Midfielder
Nuriddin Davronov**

*Far Top Left, Top Left,
Left & Above
AFC President's Cup 2012*

deficit to claim the title with a 2-1 win in front of a crowd of just under 20,000.

“They played the first time in the AFC President's Cup in 2011, but did not make the final. The team was very young and we also didn't have any foreign players,” adds Sulaymonov, who was an unused substitute during the tournament.

“It was an amazing experience. The players played in the U-17 World Cup and saw this level of tournament, but most of the players just played in the local league, so this was a great experience for them.”

Istiklol reclaimed the Tajik Cup in 2013, while also finishing second in the league, before reclaiming their position as the dominant domestic force by completing the treble in 2014 to earn a place in the group stage of the AFC Cup.

“We won the AFC President's Cup in 2012 in Dushanbe and it was hard. We didn't qualify from the group stage on our first attempt, but we continued to work

*Far Bottom Left
Sulaymonov Shakhzod
(far left) & Murodjon
Umarov (far right)*

hard and we did not switch off,” says current Istiklol midfielder Davronov, who started every game during the 2012 AFC President's Cup campaign having also been part of the squad at the 2007 FIFA U-17 World Cup.

“We worked in training and it gave us the title as we won the AFC President's Cup. All of Asia knew about us, we showed that Tajikistan has football with good players.

“We have only a few players left who won the AFC President's Cup and we have been playing together for a long time. And thanks to the experience of the AFC President's Cup we are now showing good results in the AFC Cup. We started our journey in the AFC President's Cup and we now believe we have the potential to win the AFC Cup.”

And despite being drawn in a seemingly daunting Group C alongside defending champions Qadsia SC from Kuwait, 2012 finalists Arbil from Iraq and Turkmenistan's Ahal FC, Istiklol lost just once en route to topping the table in this year's AFC Cup.

That earned Mubin Ergashev's side a home tie with Syria's Al Wahda in the one-off last 16 tie, with Istiklol eventually prevailing 4-2 on penalties following a 1-1 draw after



extra-time.

"I am not amazed by the progress of the club over the last few years; this is the plan of the club. The club's president looks to create good conditions for the coaches and players to ensure they can do their job in a professional way. The president sets the goals for the club very high," says Ergashev, who joined the club in January 2014 and is also currently the coach of the Tajikistan national team.

"We always expected to be able to compete in the AFC Cup as we knew what our possibilities are and we have a lot of potential. We were in a difficult group, but we were able to finish top of the standings.

"We want to achieve the best we can over the next five years in both domestic and international competitions. I think this target will not change, with the main target for us being to win an international competition."

And Malaysia's Pahang FA were also unable to stop Istiklol and succumbed to a 5-3 defeat on aggregate in the quarter-finals after Ergashev's side romped to a 4-0 first leg home win.

And that leaves Davronov, Fathulloev,

"We want to achieve the best we can over the next five years in both domestic and international competitions."

**Coach
Mubin Ergashev**

who along with Sharipov were all part of the Tajikistan squad at the 2007 FIFA U-17 World Cup, as well as Manuchehr Jalilov and Eraj Rajabov and team manager Sulaymonov among those left looking to add to the 2012 AFC President's Cup success, although three-time winners Kuwait SC pose a new threat in the semi-finals.

But regardless if Istiklol win the right to host the October 31 AFC Cup final against either Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim or Qadsia, it amounts to an impressive debut just three years after winning the AFC President's Cup.

And having progressed so far in such a

short space of time and with a history of youth development and of giving young players an opportunity to progress, Istiklol's academy of 140 students based just outside of Dushanbe is already molding the talent of the future. Opened in 2013, the academy offers children born between 2000-2004 the opportunity to train and sleep at the facility.

"We expected this success as we wanted this. Our president has a passion for football and we have many sponsors who like football and they finance the team," said Istiklol director Murodjon Umarov, who joined the club in 2010 initially as a technical director.

"First you must want something very hard and if you have that you can achieve it. It was our dream to play in the AFC Cup and the dream came true.

"Every club has their own academy and we wanted to be professional to bring up our own players so they have a future. We plan to go forward and want to participate in the AFC Champions League."



*Left, Above &
Top Right
AFC Cup 2015*

*Right
Mubin Ergashev*

*Below Dushanbe
Central Stadium*



Asian Champions

Australia Lead The Way



FC Asian Cup winners and 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifiers Australia maintained their 100% record at the start of the joint qualifiers for the 2018 FIFA World Cup and 2019 AFC Asian Cup after recording wins over Bangladesh and Tajikistan in September.

Having started the campaign with a 2-1 away win over Kyrgyzstan in June, the Socceroos returned to Australia for the first time since their 2015 AFC Asian Cup final success and delighted the crowd in Perth with a 5-0 win over Bangladesh.

A return to Central Asia soon followed, and after Mark Milligan had finally given the Socceroos the lead just before half-time in Dushanbe, a late double from captain Tim Cahill sealed a 3-0 win.

And with Jordan being held at home by Kyrgyzstan before beating Bangladesh 4-0, Australia moved two points clear at the top of the Group B table with the group winners along with the four best runners-up directly advancing to the 2019 AFC Asian Cup as well as the final round of qualifying for the 2018 FIFA World Cup when the qualifying campaign concludes in March 2016.

The next best 24 teams will compete in a separate competition for the remaining slots at the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

Korea Republic, who also appeared in Brazil last year, moved clear at the top of Group

G alongside Kuwait with wins over Laos and Lebanon.

The United Arab Emirates, having claimed third place in Australia ahead of hosting the 2019 tournament, recorded a 10-0 win over Malaysia in Group A thanks to four goals from Ahmed Khalil and a hat-trick from 2015 AFC Asian Cup top scorer Ali Mabkhout.

A goalless draw with Palestine let slip their perfect start and Mahdi Ali's side find themselves



a point clear of Saudi Arabia, although the Green Falcons' meeting with Malaysia was abandoned in the closing stages due to crowd disturbances with Bert van Marwijk's side holding a 2-1 lead.

Saudi Arabia had earlier recorded a 7-0 win over Timor Leste.

Iran, meanwhile, find themselves in a three-way tie at the top of Group D after recording back-to-back wins over Guam and India.

Japan, who along with Australia, Korea Republic and Iran were Asia's representatives at the FIFA World Cup in Brazil last year, also recorded a pair of wins over Cambodia and Afghanistan in September to make a belated start to their campaign having been held to a goalless draw at home by Singapore in June.

Japan, though, find themselves two points off the pace in Group E after Syria maintained their 100% record with 6-0 wins over both Afghanistan and Cambodia.

In Group C, Hong Kong had grabbed the headlines earlier in the campaign and Kim Pan-gon's side continued that form with a heroic goalless draw with neighbours China. But despite a pair of late goals, Qatar proved one step too far and the Gulf Cup champions posted a 3-2 win to move two points clear of both Hong Kong and unbeaten China, who recorded a 3-0 win over the Maldives.

Elsewhere, Thailand lead Group F by three points over Iraq after fighting back from a two-goal deficit to share a 2-2 draw at home with the 2007 AFC Asian Cup winners.

Iraq were the only one of the 39 teams not to begin their campaign in June and opened their account with a 5-1 win over Chinese Taipei.

Finally in Group H, DPR Korea lead the way with a three point cushion over Uzbekistan and the Philippines after recording a 1-0 win over Bahrain.

Second Round

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
UAE	3	2	1	0	11	0	11	7
Saudi Arabia	2	2	0	0	10	2	8	6
Palestine	3	1	1	1	8	3	5	4
Timor Leste	3	0	1	2	1	9	-8	1
Malaysia	3	0	1	2	1	17	-6	1

11/06/15

Malaysia 1 (Safiee Sali 34) Timor Leste 1 (Ramon Sario 90+3)

Saudi Arabia 3 (Yahya Al Shehri 6, Mohammed Al Sahlawi 47, 90+3) Palestine 2 (Pablo Bravo 51, Matias Hadwa 90+2)

16/06/15

Timor Leste 0 United Arab Emirates 1 (Omar Abdulrahman 80)

Malaysia 0 Palestine 6 (Musab Battat 9, Sameh Maraba 22, 75, Tamer Seyam 41, 89, Khader Abuhammad 63)

03/09/15

United Arab Emirates 10 (Mohand Salem 16, Ali Mabkhout 22, 33, 75, Ahmed Khalil 24, 29, 71, 78, Habib Al Fardan 25, Mohamed Gharib 39)

Malaysia 0

Saudi Arabia 7 (Yahya Al Shehri 3, Mohammed Al Sahlawi 23, 26, 71, Salman Al Faraj 30, Fahad Al Muwallad 74) Timor Leste 0

08/09/15

Palestine 0 United Arab Emirates 0

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Australia	3	3	0	0	10	1	9	9
Jordan	3	2	1	0	7	1	6	7
Kyrgyzstan	3	1	1	1	4	3	1	4
Tajikistan	3	0	1	2	2	7	-5	1
Bangladesh	4	0	1	3	2	13	-11	1

11/06/15

Bangladesh 1 (Valerii Kichin 32 OG) Kyrgyzstan 3 (Anton Zemlianukhin 9, 41, Edgar Bernhardt 29)

Tajikistan 1 (Manuchehr Dzhalilov 67) Jordan 3 (Hassan Abdell Fattah 29, 64, 88)

16/06/15

Bangladesh 1 (Jahid Ameli 50) Tajikistan 1 (Fathullo Fathuloulo 87)

Kyrgyzstan 1 (Aldanzbek Mirzaliev 90+2)

Australia 2 (Mile Jedinak 2, Tommy Oar 68)

03/09/15

Australia 5 (Mathew Leckie 6, Tom Rogic 8, 20, Nathan Burns 29, Aaron Mooy 62) Bangladesh 0

Jordan 0 Kyrgyzstan 0

08/09/15

Bangladesh 0 Jordan 4 (Abdullah Deeb 14, 57, Monther Abu Amara 33, Yaseen Bakheet 59)

Tajikistan 0 Australia 3 (Mark Milligan 57, Tim Cahill 74, 90+1)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Qatar	3	3	0	0	19	2	17	9
China	3	2	1	0	9	0	9	7
Hong Kong	4	2	1	1	11	3	8	7
Maldives	3	0	0	3	0	6	-6	0
Bhutan	3	0	0	3	0	28	-28	0

11/06/15

Hong Kong 7 (Jaimes McKee 19, 57, Christian Amnan 23, Lo Kwan Yee 30, Ju Yingzhi 42, Lam Ka Wai 49, Godfred Karikari 68) Bhutan 0

Maldives 0 Qatar 1 (Ahmed El Sayed 90+8)

16/06/15

Bhutan 0 China 6 (Yang Xu 45+2, 61, 76, Wu Lei 55, Yu Dabao 67, 83)

Hong Kong 2 (Xu Deshuai 63, Lam Ka Wai 67)

Maldives 0

03/09/15

China 0 Hong Kong 0

Qatar 15 (Mohamed Musa 8, 28, Mohammed Kasola 18, Ali Asadulla 21, 45, 63, Hasan Al Haydos 25, 87, Mohammed Muntari 38, 41, 48, Ali Ajif 56, Boualem Khoukht 62, 70, Ismail Mohamed 75) Bhutan 0

08/09/15

Maldives 0 China 3 (Yu Dabao 8, 57, Zhang Linpeng 66)

Hong Kong 2 (Bai He 87, Godfred Karikari 89)

Qatar 3 (Karim Boudiaf 22, Abdelkarim Hassan 62, Mohamed Musa 84)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Iran	3	2	1	0	10	1	9	7
Guam	3	2	1	0	5	2	3	7
Oman	4	2	1	1	3	7	-4	7
Turkmenistan	3	0	1	2	2	5	-3	1
India	3	0	0	3	2	7	-5	0

11/06/15

Guam 1 (Serdar Annaorazov 12 OG)

Turkmenistan 0

India 1 (Sunil Chhetri 26) Oman 2 (Qasim Said 1, Amad Al Hosni 40)

16/06/15

Guam 2 (Brandon McDonald 37, Travis Nicklaw 62)

India 1 (Sunil Chhetri 90+3)

Turkmenistan 1 (Ruslan Mingazov 45+1) Iran 1 (Sardar Azmoun 4)

03/09/15

Iran 6 (Ashkan Dejagah 10, Mehdi Taremi 31, 65, Sardar Azmoun 34, 41, Mahdi Torabi 89) Guam 0

Oman 3 (Raed Saleh 7, Mekan Saparov 11 OG, Amad Al Hosni 59) Turkmenistan 1 (Arslanmyrat Amanov 83)

08/09/15

Guam Oman 0

India 0 Iran 3 (Sardar Azmoun 29, Andranik Teymourian 47, Mehdi Taremi 50)



Second Round

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Syria	3	3	0	0	13	0	13	9
Japan	3	2	1	0	9	0	9	7
Singapore	3	1	1	1	4	1	3	4
Afghanistan	3	1	0	2	1	12	-11	3
Cambodia	4	0	0	4	0	14	-14	0

11/06/15

Cambodia 0 Singapore 4 (Khairul Amri 9, Sufiwan Baharudin 21, 35, Fazrul Nawaz 55) Afghanistan 0 Syria 6 (Reja Rafi 19, 35, Mouaiad Al Ajian 40, Abdulrazak Al Husein 70, Sanharib Malki 75, Omar Kharbin 90+3)

16/06/15

Cambodia 0 Afghanistan 1 (Mustafa Zazai 86) Japan 0 Singapore 0

03/09/15

Japan 3 (Keisuke Honda 28, Maya Yoshida 50, Shinji Kagawa 61) Cambodia 0 Syria 1 (Oday Abduljaffal 59) Singapore 0

08/09/15

Cambodia 0 Syria 6 (Omar Kharbin 29, 39, Sanharib Malki 31, Mahmoud Al Mawas 45, Omro Al Midani 50, Osama Omari 81)

Afghanistan 0 Japan 6 (Shinji Kagawa 10, 49, Masato Morishige 35, Shinji Okazaki 57, 60, Keisuke Honda 74)

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Thailand	3	2	1	0	5	2	3	7
Iraq	2	1	1	0	7	3	4	4
Vietnam	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Chinese Taipei	3	0	0	3	2	9	-7	0

24/05/15

Thailand 1 (Pokklaw Anan 81) Vietnam 0

16/06/15

Chinese Taipei 0 Thailand 2 (Teerasil Dangda 21, 40) Iraq 5 (Ali Adnan 37, Ali Faisal 59, Ahmed Yasin 80, Younus Mahmood 88, Justin Meram 90+1) Chinese Taipei 1 (Wen Chih Hao 86)

08/09/15

Chinese Taipei 1 (Wu Chun Cheng 83) Vietnam 2 (Dinh Tien Thanh 54, Tran Phi Son 90+3) Thailand 2 (Theerathon Bunmathan 81, Mongkol Tossakrai 84) Iraq 2 (Justin Meram 34, Younus Mahmood 49)

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Korea Republic	3	3	0	0	13	0	13	9
Kuwait	3	3	0	0	12	0	12	9
Lebanon	3	1	0	2	2	4	-2	3
Myanmar	3	0	1	2	2	13	-11	1
Laos	4	0	1	3	2	14	-12	1

11/06/15

Lebanon 0 Kuwait 1 (Yousef Naser 86)

Laos 2 (Khampheng Sayavutthi 81, 83) Myanmar 2 (Zaw Min Tun 41, Kyaw Zayar Win 86)

16/06/15

Myanmar 0 Korea Republic 2 (Lee Jae-sung 35, Son Heung-min 68) Laos 0 Lebanon 2 (Mohamad Ghaddar 4, Fayez Chamsine 75)

03/09/15

Korea Republic 8 (Lee Chung-kyung 9, Son Heung-min 11, 74, 90, Kwon Chang-hoon 30, 77, Suk Hyun-jun 58, Lee Jae-sung 90+3) Laos 0

Kuwait 9 (Yousef Naser 11, 18, Ali Maqseed 13, Faisal Al Harbi 46, Abdulaziz Al Enezi 61, Bader Al Mutawa 69, 89, 90+3) Myanmar 0

08/09/15

Laos 0 Kuwait 2 (Yousef Naser 31, Bader Al Mutawa 84)

Lebanon 0 Korea Republic 3 (Jang Hyun-soo 22, Ali Hamam 25 OG, Kwon Chang-hoon 60)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
DPR Korea	3	3	0	0	8	2	6	9
Uzbekistan	3	2	0	1	8	5	3	6
Philippines	3	2	0	1	5	6	-1	6
Bahrain	3	1	0	2	5	3	2	3
Yemen	4	0	0	4	0	10	-10	0

11/06/15

Yemen 0 DPR Korea 3

DPR Korea awarded 3-0 win due to Yemen fielding an ineligible player

Philippines 2 (Misagh Bahadoran 50, Javier Patino 59) Bahrain 1 (Abdulwahab Al Malood 90+3)

16/06/15

DPR Korea 4 (Pak Kwang-ryong 4, Jang Kuk-chol 16, Ro Hak-su 34, Ri Hyok-chol 36) Uzbekistan 2 (Anzur Ismailov 54, Sardor Rashidov 79)

Yemen 0 Philippines 2 (Misagh Bahadoran 52, Iain Ramsay 74)

03/09/15

Uzbekistan 1 (Alexander Geynrikh 51) Yemen 0 Bahrain 0 DPR Korea 1 (Jong Il-gwan 43)

08/09/15

Philippines 1 (Stephan Schrock 65) Uzbekistan 5 (Odil Akhmedov 1, Sardor Rashidov 14, 80, Igor Sergeev 43, 65)

Yemen 0 Bahrain 4 (Husain Mohamed 30, Sami Al Husaini 45, Abdulla Omar 66, Sayed Adhan 77)



Gamba Seal Return To Semi-Finals

Japan's Gamba Osaka returned to the semi-finals of the AFC Champions League for the first time since winning the continental title in 2008 after edging out fellow former winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors from Korea Republic 3-2 in a thrilling quarter-final second leg in September.

With the scores level ahead of the return leg after Jeonbuk had failed to make full use of home advantage at Jeonju World Cup Stadium at the end of August, the K-League Classic champions needed just 13 minutes at Expo '70 Commemorative Stadium to break the deadlock through a penalty from Brazilian Leonardo.

But after J.League treble winners Gamba restored parity a minute later through fellow Brazilian Patric, the tie remained tight with Jeonbuk having one foot in the semi-finals on away goals.

But that was shattered with 14 minutes remaining as Shu Kurata fired home from range to swing the tie in Gamba's favour.

Jeonbuk substitute Urko Vera, though, headed home with just two minutes remaining to put Choi Kang-hee's side back into the ascendancy.

But Gamba were not to be denied as substitute Koki Yonekura struck in the third minute of added time after forcing his way into the penalty area to fire home past goalkeeper Kwoun Sun-tae.

And Gamba will face China's Guangzhou Evergrande in the semi-finals after the 2013 winners closed out a 4-2 aggregate victory over J.League side Kashima Reysol after sharing a 1-1 draw in the second leg at Tianhe Sport Centre Stadium.

An own goal from Kashima captain Daisuke Suzuki and strikes from Brazilian Paulinho and Gao Lin helped Guangzhou post a 3-1 win in the first leg in Japan, with Masato Kudo netting a late consolation for the home side.

That left 2013 semi-finalists Kashima needing to score at least three goals in the return fixture, and the visitors made the ideal start to their task as Brazilian striker Cristiano headed home after just 13 minutes.

Midfielder Huang Bowen restored parity



on the night, though, via another goal of the tournament contender with a stunning 30th minute volley and Guangzhou sealed their return to the last four for the first time since beating Kashima 8-1 on aggregate in 2013 en route to claiming the title.

"The game went exactly as we expected," said Guangzhou coach Luiz Felipe Scolari after the second leg. "The quality of the game was

good as Kashima are a strong team."

In the West, 2014 finalists Al Hilal from Saudi Arabia advanced to the semi-finals for the second season in a row after Giorgos Donis' side completed a 6-3 aggregate victory over Qatar's Lekhwiya following a 2-2 draw in the second leg in Doha.

Carlos Eduardo scored twice while

fellow Brazilian Ailton and Khaled Al Kaabi were also on target as Al Hilal won the first leg 4-1 at home, with Youssef Msakni finding the net for Lekhwiya.

And it was Carlos Eduardo who increased

Al Hilal's advantage after 25 minutes of the second leg only for goals from Ismail Mohammed and Chico Flores to give Qatar champions Lekhwiya a glimmer of hope.

But after Digao netted three minutes from time for Al Hilal, the two-time Asian Club Championship winners will face Al Ahli in the semi-finals after the side from the United Arab Emirates sealed a 3-1 aggregate victory over Iranian debutants Naft Tehran.

"We started with a very high tempo for the first 30 or 35 minutes and we wanted to build the game and score," said Donis after the second leg. "But after we scored we had a lot of problems with the conditions and we lost a lot of energy and we weren't too aggressive."

"It was a crucial moment when they scored to make it 1-1 in the last second of the first half and every time this happens in a game is difficult. We gave a lot and we were tired, but we scored and we qualified for the next round."

After Rodrigo Lima had netted the only goal in Tehran in the first leg, the Brazilian and captain Ahmed Khalil were on target in Dubai as Al Ahli sealed their place in the semi-finals despite Vahid Amiri netting for the visitors at the start of the second half.





QUARTER-FINALS



Kashiwa Reysol 1 (Masato Kudo 89) Guangzhou 3 (Daisuke Suzuki 5 OG, Paulinho 40, Gao Lin 58)
15/09/15
Guangzhou 1 (Huang Bowen 30) Kashiwa Reysol 1 (Cristiano 12)



Guangzhou Evergrande
win 4-2 on aggregate



Al Hilal 4 (Ailton 11, Khalid Kaabi 34, Carlos Eduardo 36, 86) Lekhwiya 1 (Youssef Msakni 17)
15/09/15
Lekhwiya 2 (Ismail Mohamad 45+2, Chico Flores 72)
Al Hilal 2 (Carlos Eduardo 26, Digo 87)



Al Hilal
win 6-3 on aggregate



Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 0 Gamba Osaka 0
16/09/15
Gamba Osaka 3 (Patric 14, Shu Kurata 76, Koki Yonekura 90+3) Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Leonardo 13, Urko Vera 88)



Gamba Osaka
win 3-2 on aggregate



Naft Tehran 0 Al Ahli 1 (Rodrigo Lima 79)
16/09/15
Al Ahli 2 (Rodrigo Lima 26, Ahmed Khalil 48)
Naft Tehran 1 (Vahid Amiri 50)



Al Ahli
win 3-1 on aggregate



Semi-final Duo Make AFC Cup History

FC Istiklol of Tajikistan and Malaysian champions Johor Darul Ta'zim became the first sides from their nations to reach the AFC Cup semi-finals after they eliminated Malaysia's Pahang FA and South China of Hong Kong in the quarter-finals.

Debutants Istiklol had taken a commanding 4-0 first leg lead over Pahang at the end of August with Dilshod Vasiev netting a brace at Dushanbe's Republic Central Stadium.

But two goals by midfielder Hafiz Kamal either side of half-time in the second leg at Stadium Darul Makmur gave the Malaysians hope, in spite of the first half sending off of defender Mohamad Saiful.

Khurshed Makhmudov, though, netted a vital away goal on the hour mark to restore Istiklol's momentum before a stoppage time strike from Pahang substitute Saarvindran Devendran saw the home side win the second leg 3-1, but it was not enough to deny the visitors a 5-3 aggregate win.

"The away goal helped us a lot," said Istiklol coach Mubin Ergashev after the second leg. "We could have done better and scored more from the chances we had."

Dickson Nwakaeme caused a lot of problems for our defence and Pahang were good tonight despite the red card."

And Istiklol will face Kuwait SC in the semi-finals after the three-time winners completed a 7-1 aggregate victory over Hong Kong's Kitchee.

Kuwait SC had also brought a large lead into the second leg with Hong Kong champions Kitchee having beaten Abraham Garcia's side 6-0 in the first leg in Kuwait City.

Former AFC Foreign Player of the Year Rogerinho started the rout with a 12th minute opener before goals from Fahad Al Enezi and Chadi Hammami gave Kuwait SC a 3-0 lead at half-time. Rogerinho completed his brace early in the second half before fellow Brazilian Vinicius Lopes and Ali Al Kandari added the side's fifth and sixth goals late on.

In the second leg at Mongkok Stadium, Kitchee got off to a good start with a goal from Brazilian Paulinho after nine minutes, but any hope of an improbable comeback



were quashed four minutes into the second half as Kuwait SC's Fahed Al Hajri levelled the scores.

"We played a tactical match and the players applied my game plan as instructed; Kitchee are dangerous when they have space so we wanted to close them down," said Kuwait SC coach Mohammad Ibrahim.

"We made a serious mistake at the beginning and Kitchee scored from it, but after that they created no real chances in the first half."

On the opposite side of the draw, Johor recorded a 4-2 aggregate success over South China, while defending champions Qadsia SC from Kuwait edged out inaugural AFC Cup winners Al Jaish of Syria 3-2 on aggregate.

Johor's Luciano Figueiroa and South China's Mahama Awal had both hit the target in the first leg in Malaysia leaving the tie delicately poised at 1-1 ahead of the return meeting in



Hong Kong.

But Mahali Jasuli stunned the sold-out Mongkok Stadium with the opener for Johor on 26 minutes in the return fixture before Awal levelled the scores two minutes later.

Johor, though, hit back with Safee Sali's instant reply on the half hour before the Malaysia forward added his second just before half-time to secure a 4-2 aggregate win for the visitors despite the sending off of Figueiroa.

"I'm very happy with the result and to be in the semi-finals. It is history for Johor," said Johor coach Mario Gomez after securing victory against his former club who he left in April.

"We showed very good character and our organisation was very important as South China kept attacking, but they only had two real chances in the second half. Our discipline was very important."

Finally, AFC Cup holders Qadsia returned to the semi-finals of the AFC Cup for a third year in a row after their 3-0 victory in Kuwait City in the first leg tie against Al Jaish was just enough to edge the Syrian side despite the 2004 winners securing a 2-0 win of their own in the return fixture.



QUARTER-FINALS



25/08/15

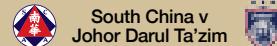
Qadsia SC 3 (Fahed Al Ebrahim 12, Doris Salomo 64, Bader Al Mutawa 69) Al Jaish 0

15/09/15

Al Jaish 2 (Khaled Hajah 35 OG, Mahmood Al Baher 51) Qadsia SC 0



Qadsia SC
win 3-2 on aggregate



25/08/15

Johor Darul Ta'zim 1 (Luciano Figueroa 49) South China 1 (Mahama Awal 63)

15/09/15

South China 1 (Mahama Awal 28) Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Mahali Jasuli 26, Safiee Sali 30, 47)



Johor Darul Ta'zim
win 4-2 on aggregate



26/08/15

Kuwait SC 6 (Rogerinho 12, 52, Fahad Al Enezi 21, Chadi Hammami 45+4, Vincius Lopes 82, Ali Al Kandari 90+2)

16/09/15

Kitchee 0 (Paulinho 9) Kuwait SC 1 (Fahad Al Hajeri 49)



Kuwait SC
win 7-1 on aggregate



26/08/15

FC Istiklol 4 (Mahdi Chahjooci 35, Dilshod Vasev 36, 77, Khurshed Makhmudov 51)

Pahang FA 0

16/09/15

Pahang FA 3 (Hafiz Kamal 31, 58, Saarvindran Devendran 90+2) FC Istiklol 1 (Khurshed Makhmudov 61)



FC Istiklol
win 5-3 on aggregate



Japan Win Record-Breaking Fourth Crown

Midfielder Narumi Miura dispatched the winning spot-kick as Japan claimed a record-breaking fourth AFC U-19 Women's Championship title in China at the end of August with a 4-2 penalty shootout victory over DPR Korea in the final following a 0-0 draw after extra-time.

After dominating the first 60 minutes at Jiangning Sports Centre Stadium in Nanjing, Asako Takakura's Young Nadeshiko came under intense pressure later in the game and were indebted to goalkeeper Chika Hirao for two world-class saves at the end of normal time before she then saved the third of DPR Korea's four penalties.

The 2011 winners had earlier advanced to the semi-finals as Group A table-toppers on the back of successive victories over Australia, Uzbekistan and hosts China before tournament MVP Rikako Kobayashi's fourth goal of the campaign edged out holders Korea Republic 1-0 in the semi-finals.

"In the first half we dominated but couldn't take advantage of that and score, and in the second half it was much more difficult for us and we had to defend," said Takakura after the final, with Japan also qualifying for the 2016 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup in Papua New Guinea alongside DPR Korea and third place finishers Korea Republic.

"To win this championship was our aim, so I'm very happy with the overall performance of my team in this tournament."

Having opened their campaign with 5-0 and 9-0 wins over Thailand and debutants Iran, 2007 winners DPR Korea then saw off Korea Republic 1-0 in the group decider as they progressed to the last four on top of Group B.



A 2-0 semi-final victory over hosts China not only guaranteed Hwang Yong-bong's team their passage to Papua New Guinea, but also meant they went into the final as the competition's highest scorers with 17 goals without conceding.

But after the tournament's six-goal top scorer Ri Un-sim and midfielder Kim Un-

hwa were both denied by the excellence of Hirao, Jo Ryon-hwa and Wi Jong-sim missed from the spot at the end of the final to condemn DPR Korea to their third successive runners-up finish.

"In the first half we were too excited to be in the final, but in the second half we played much better but missed so many opportunities," said Hwang.

"I told them after the penalty shootout that we can do much better in the future. We need to keep working on our passing and positioning, but I am happy with our overall performance in the tournament."

Earlier in the day, Korea Republic, disappointing in successive 1-0 reversals to DPR Korea and Japan, faced off against China in the third place play-off with the final spot at the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup up for grabs.

And it was a dominant performance by Jong Song-chon's 2013 winners that saw them claim a 4-0 victory.

"After the Japan match the coaches and players discussed how this was our last opportunity, so our tactic was to attack; I want to congratulate them for their efforts," said Jong.

"The competition has been an opportunity for us to learn from the other teams, both physically and tactically," said Wang.

"Now we have to look at how we can develop in the future."





Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Japan	3	3	0	0	11	2	9	9
China	3	2	0	1	13	4	9	6
Australia	3	1	0	2	3	4	-1	3
Uzbekistan	3	0	0	3	0	17	-17	0

18/08/15

Australia 0 Japan 2 (Rikako Kobayashi 10, 28)

China 9 (Shi Tianlun 14, Xiao Yuyi 20, 41, 58, Yan Jinjin 31, 32, 51, Zhang Zhu 66, Shokhida Tojiddinova 79 OG) Uzbekistan 0

20/08/15

Japan 6 (Mizuki Sonoda 5, 77, Kiko Seike 25, 35, 47, Yui Hasegawa 36) Uzbekistan 0

China 2 (Qin Manman 38, Liu Yan 55) Australia 1 (Amy Harrison 67) 22/08/15

China 2 (Shi Tianlun 71, Pan Jiahui 84) Japan 3 (Rikako Kobayashi 22, Meika Nishida 64, Hikaru Kitagawa 75)

Australia 2 (Ayesha Kirby 36, Chloe O'Brien 90+3) Uzbekistan 0

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
DPR Korea	3	3	0	0	15	0	15	9
Korea Republic	3	2	0	1	16	1	15	6
Thailand	3	1	0	2	7	9	-2	3
Iran	3	0	0	3	1	29	-28	0

19/08/15

Korea Republic 13 (Hwang Hye-soo 11, 24, Choi Hee-jeong 14, 36, Namgung Ye-ji 37, 59, Son Hwa-yeon 52, 78, Wie Jae-eun 60, 72, 81, Park Yee-un 65, Song Ji-yoon 90) Iran 0

DPR Korea 5 (Jon So-yon 38, Ri Kyong-hyang 47, Ri Un-sim 63, 66, 87) Thailand 0

21/08/15

Thailand 0 Korea Republic 3 (Jang Chang 52, 71, Namgung Ye-ji 75) Iran 0 DPR Korea 9 (Ri Un-sim 27, 63, Jon So-yon 33, Wi Jong-sim 36, Kim Phyong-hwa 39, Ri Kyong-hyang 48, Ri Hui-jong 86, Kim So-hyang 88, Choe Un-hwa 90+4)

23/08/15

Korea Republic 0 DPR Korea 1 (Ri Hyang-sim 62)

Thailand 7 (Saowaluk Pengngam 3, 11, 53, 68, Jenjira Bubpha 81, 84, 89) Iran 1 (Sara Zohrabi 99)

Semi-Finals

26/08/15

Japan 1 (Rikako Kobayashi 82) Korea Republic 0

China 0 DPR Korea 2 (Ri Un-sim 29, Ri Kyong-hyang 61) Thueanklang 23

Third Place Play-Off

29/08/15

China 0 Korea Republic 4 (Wang Ying 50 OG, Son Hwa-yeon 59, 67, Jang Chang 69)

Final

29/08/15

Japan 0 DPR Korea 0

Japan win 4-2 on penalties AET



Shamsaee Leads Hosts Tasisat To Futsal Glory

Tasisat Daryaei ended Iran's three-year drought at the AFC Futsal Club Championship as veteran Vahid Shamsaee led the hosts to a 5-4 victory over Kuwait's Qadsia SC in the final to cap a stellar display in front of a partisan crowd in Isfahan.

The tournament hosts ended Iran's disappointing run thanks to a pair of goals from Iran national team captain Asghar Hassanzadeh as well as strikes from Ghodrat Bahadori, Reza Sangsefidi and Shamsaee before holding off a determined Qadsia to claim the title.

Tasisat led 2-0 at half-time, but the game turned increasingly frantic in the dying minutes as the Kuwaitis pushed to pull level.

Abdulrahman Al Wadi scored twice in the last three minutes after Hamad Hayat had already scored for Qadsia, while Abdulrahman Al Tawail's goal in the final seconds made for a nervous finish for Tasisat.

But with Shamsaee on the scoresheet for the 10th time in six games – the most in the competition – Tasisat sealed the win that their dominance throughout the entire event deserved.

Both Tasisat and Qadsia had been drawn

in Group A alongside Al Khaleej of the United Arab Emirates and the hosts kicked off their campaign with a comprehensive 8-1 win before Qadsia recorded a 9-1 victory over the inexperienced side from Dubai.

Tasisat, though, ensured top spot in Group A with a 9-2 win over Qadsia in the group decider as both teams advanced to the quarter-finals.

In Group B, defending champions Nagoya Oceans progressed but were forced to settle for second place following a 2-2 draw with newcomers MFC Emgek from Kyrgyzstan after both sides had earlier beaten Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv.

Group C, meanwhile, proved to be the tightest in the competition with NAFT Al Wasat Club of Iraq, former champions Chonburi Bluewave from Thailand and Qatar's Al Rayyan all recording a win and a loss to leave all three teams tied on four points.

NAFT's five goals scored across both games ensured they topped the group, while a better head-to-head record thanks to Al Rayyan's win in their encounter with Chonburi meant the Qataris finished in second place, saw the 2013 winners exit the competition.

There was another surprise in Group D as Shenzhen Nanling Tielang, semi-finalists

a year before, also crashed out as the Chinese side finished bottom of the table behind Vietnam's Thai Son Nam and Lebanon's Bank of Beirut.

Thai Son Nam continued their run in the quarter-finals with a 2-1 win over Al Rayyan, while NAFT edged out Bank of Beirut 3-2 on penalties following a 4-4 draw after extra-time.

Qadsia booked their place in the semi-finals with a 4-1 over MFC Emgek, while late goals from Shamsaee and Mohammad Zarei helped Tasisat edge out Nagoya.

Those results saw Thai Son Nam take on Qadsia in the semi-finals, which represented a first appearance in the last four for both clubs,

And it was the Kuwaitis who emerged victorious after winning 2-1 on penalties following a 3-3 draw after extra-time.

Tasisat's march to the final, meanwhile, continued against Iraq's NAFT with Majid Raeisi scoring a hat-trick in a comprehensive 7-3 win.

And NAFT's disappointment continued into the third place play-off, where Thai Son Nam posted a 7-3 win to record their best-ever result at the AFC Futsal Club Championship.





Group A							+/ - Pts
	P	W	D	L	F	A	
Tasisat Daryaei	2	2	0	0	3	14	6
Qadsia SC	2	1	0	1	11	10	1
Al Khaleej	2	0	0	2	2	17	-15

31/07/2015

Tasisat Daryaei 8 (Abolghasem Orouji 2, Rashid Obaid 8 OG, Vahid Shamsaei 9, 29, Mohammad Keshavarz 12, Ghodrat Bahadori 18, Saeid Abbasi 19, Ali Hassanzadeh 21) Al Khaleej 1 (Yousif Mohamed 20)

01/08/2015

Qadsia SC 9 (Abdulrahman Al Tawail 6, 27, 38, Dario 14, 22, Hamad Hayat 20, Mohammad Taheri 25, 33, Abdulrahman Al Wadi 36) Al Khaleej 1 (Yousif Mohamed 8)

02/08/2015

Tasisat Daryaei 9 (Mohammad Keshavarz 4, Mohammad Zarei 9, Vahid Shamsaei 24, 26, 28, 31, Asghar Hassanzadeh 32, 33, Ali Ebrahimi 36) Qadsia SC 2 (Abdulrahman Al Wadi 7, Rafael 35)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/ - Pts
MFC Emgek	2	1	1	0	10	5	5
Nagoya Oceans	2	1	1	0	7	4	3
Lokomotiv	2	0	0	2	5	13	-8

31/07/2015

Nagoya Oceans 5 (Rafael Sakai 3, 18, Ryuta Hoshi 22, Matias Maedonchi 32, Pedro Costa 34) Lokomotiv 2 (Sarvar Shaakhmedov 16, Shokirjon Khadiev 37)

01/08/2015

MFC Emgek 8 (Ilias Chotbaev 2, 38, Salamat Mamchetbaev 12, Ruslan Ermekov 21, 37, 39 Aksaraly Danibaev 24, Ruslan Gafurov 40) Lokomotiv 3 (Sarvar Shaakhmedov 5, 19, Tokhir Abdurazzakov 25)

02/08/2015

Nagoya Oceans 2 (Serginho 14, Kaoru Morioka 36) MFC Emgek 2 (Rustam Ermekov 10, Ruslan Gafurov 40)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/ - Pts
NAFT Al Wasat Club	2	1	0	1	5	5	0
Al Rayyan	2	1	0	1	4	4	0
Chonburi Bluewave	2	1	0	1	4	4	0

31/07/2015

Chonburi Bluewave 3 (Jirawat Sorniwichian 16, 29, Sarawut Jaipetch 28) NAFT Al Wasat Club 2 (Waleed Khalid 28, 31)

01/08/2015

NAFT Al Wasat Club 3 (Firas Mohammed 14, Mohammad Naser 26, 37) Al Rayyan 2 (Rashid Yousef 37, Lucas Oliveira 38)

02/08/2015

Chonburi Bluewave 1 (Kritsada Wongkao 28) Al Rayyan 2 (Diego Nunes 27, Flavio 35)



Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/ - Pts
Thai Son Nam	2	1	1	0	8	4	4
Bank of Beirut	2	1	1	0	8	6	2
Shenzhen Nanling Tielang	2	0	0	2	4	10	-6

31/07/2015

Shenzhen Nanling Tielang 1 (Zeng Lang 18) Thai Son Nam 5 (Saul Olmo Campana 26, 37, 38, Tran Long Vu 29, Le Quoc Nam 36)

01/08/2015

Thai Son Nam 3 (Tran Van Vu 9, Ahmad Kheir El Dine 20 OG, Ngo Ngoc Son 26) Bank of Beirut 3 (Rudolpho Da Costa 1, 25, Ahmad Kheir El Dine 31)

02/08/2015

Bank of Beirut 5 (Rudolpho Da Costa 10, 11, Mohammad Kobeissy 13, Mehdi Javid 39, Hussain Hamadani 40) Shenzhen Nanling Tielang 3 (Lu Yue 13, Eder 22, Ahmad Esmailpour 23)

Quarter-Finals

04/08/2015

Thai Son Nam 2 (Saul Olmo Campana 1, Tran Vong Lu 4) Al Rayyan 1 (Ngo Dinh Thuan 12 OG)

NAFT Al Wasat Club 4 (Mohammad Naser 14, 25, 32, Waleed Khaled 28) Bank of Beirut 4 (Rudolpho Da Costa 5, Ahmad Kheir El Dine 15, Karim Abou Zeid 17, 36) AET

NAFT Al Wasat Club win 3-2 on penalties

Qadsia SC 4 (Rafael 13, 37, Mohammad Taheri 16, Abdulrahman Al Tawail 27) MFC Emgek 1 (Rustam Ermekov 40)

Tasisat Daryaei 4 (Vahid Shamsaei 7, 38, Reza Sangsefidi 21, Mohammad Zarei 39) Nagoya Oceans 3 (Rafael Sakai 2, 40, Kaoru Morioka 34)

Semi-Finals

Thai Son Nam 3 (Tran Van Vu 2, Phung Trong Luan 22, Artur Yunusov 36) Qadsia SC 3 (Abdulrahman Al Wadi 5, 6, Mohammad Taheri 16) AET

Qadsia SC win 2-1 on penalties

Tasisat Daryaei 7 (Ghodrat Bahadori 2, Majid Raeisi 12, 14, 31, Mohammad Keshavarz 17, Reza Sangsefidi 21, Vahid Shamsaei 40) NAFT Al Wasat Club 3 (Mohammad Naser 4, Rafid Hameed 15, Ali Abdulelah 26)

Third Place Play-off

Thai Son Nam 7 (Tran Long Vu 1, Nguyen Minh Tri 12, 23, Mohammad Naser Safari 15 OG, Tran Van Vu 29, 40, Le Quoc Nam 32) NAFT Al Wasat Club 3 (Mohammad Naser 7, Waleed Khaled 23, Ali Abdulelah 26)

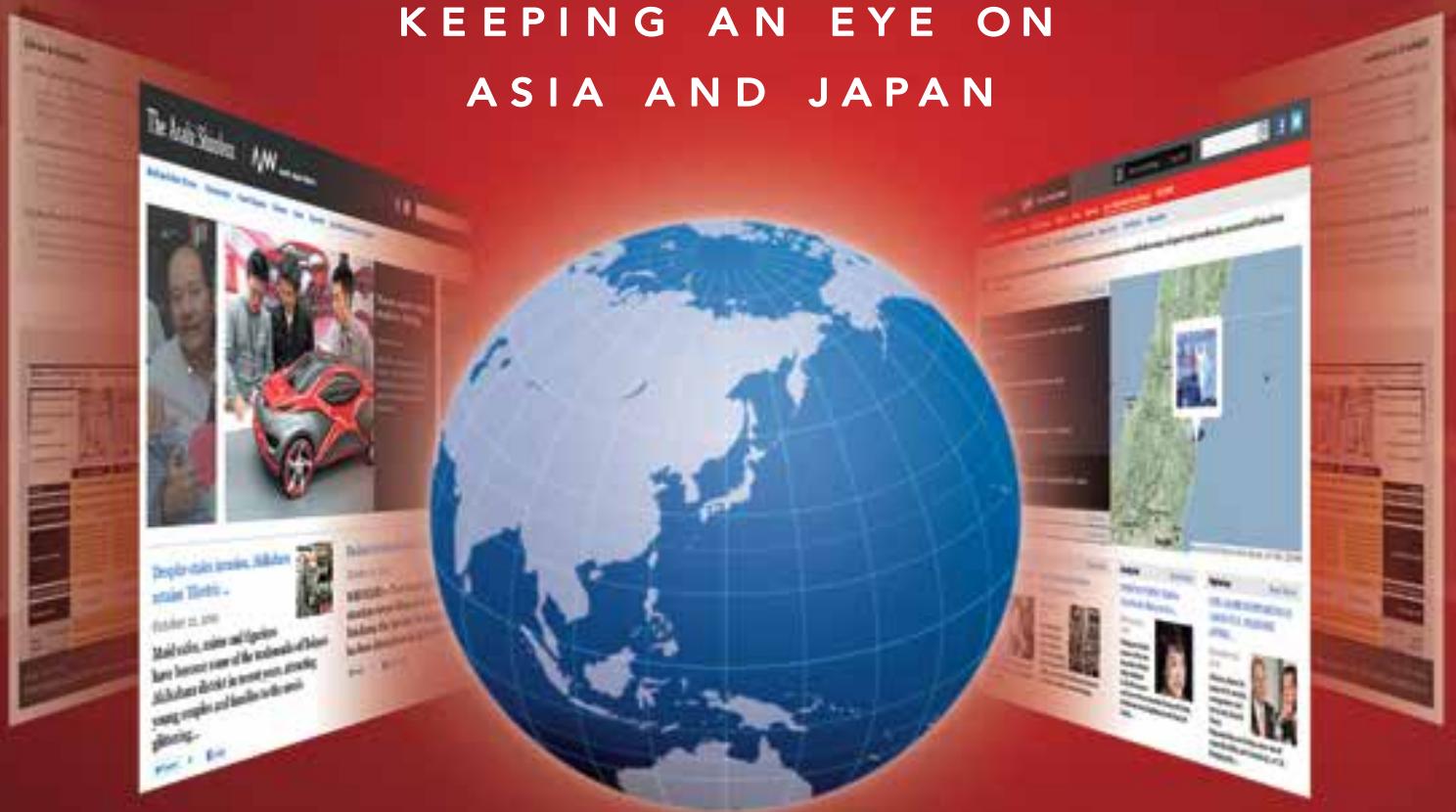
Final

Tasisat Daryaei 5 (Asghar Hassanzadeh 2, 38, Ghodrat Bahadori 7, Reza Sangsefidi 22, Vahid Shamsaei 36) Qadsia SC 4 (Hamad Hayat 23, Abdulrahman Al Wadi 37, 38, Abdulrahman Al Tawail 40)



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KEEPING AN EYE ON ASIA AND JAPAN



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Pair Remain On Course for AFC Cup

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
K-Electric FC	2	1	1	0	4	3	1 4
Druk United	2	0	2	0	3	3	0 2
Khoromkhon FC	2	0	1	1	0	1	-1 1

11/08/15

K-Electric FC 3 (*Muhammad Rasool* 8, 45, *Habib-Ur Rehman* 86) Druk United 3 (*Tshering Dorji* 21, *Tshering Wangdi* 58, *Dorji* 75)

13/08/15

Khoromkhon FC 0 K-Electric FC 1 (*Abayomi Oludeyi* 74)

15/08/15

Druk United 0 Khoromkhon FC 0

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
Lt. Sheikh Jamal	2	1	1	0	5	2	3 4
Dhanmondi Club	2	1	1	0	3	1	2 4
FC Alga	2	1	1	0	3	1	2 4
Casa Benfica	2	0	0	2	1	6	-5 0

11/08/15

Casa Benfica 0 FC Alga 2 (*Ivan Filatov* 29, *Mirbek Akhmataliev* 65)

13/08/15

Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club 4 (*Emeka Onuoha* 44, *Mamunul Islam* 72, *Mohammed Rony* 77, 86) Casa Benfica 1 (*Nicholas Torrao* 26)

15/08/15

FC Alga 1 (*Ildar Amirov* 22) Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club 1 (*Emeka Onuoha* 78)

Pakistan Premier League winners K-Electric FC and Bangladeshi champions Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club advanced to the 2016 AFC Cup play-offs following the completion of the six-team qualifying round in August.

K-Electric, who denied 2013 AFC President's Cup runners-up KRL a fourth consecutive Pakistani crown with their maiden triumph in the 2014/15 competition, opened up their continental campaign with a thrilling 3-3 draw against hosts Druk United of Bhutan.

Striker Muhammad Rasool had twice put K-Electric in the driving seat with a brace only for Druk United to take a 3-2 lead into the closing minutes, before substitute Habib-Ur Rehman scored late on to salvage a point for the Pakistanis.

A strike from Nigerian forward Abayomi Oludeyi with 16 minutes remaining was then enough to secure K-Electric a 1-0 win over Mongolia's Khormkhon FC before a goalless draw between Khormkhon and Druk United at Thimpu's Changlimithang Stadium was enough to see the Pakistan champions top the three-team group.

In Kyrgyzstan in Group B, hosts FC Alga got off to winning ways against back-to-back Liga de

Elite champions Casa Benfica in Bishkek as Ivan Filatov and Mirbek Akhmataliev scored goals either side of half-time, before the Macanese club suffered a heavy 4-1 defeat to Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi.

Macau striker Nicholas Torrao had given Casa Benfica the lead midway through the first half, but Nigerian Emeka Onuoha levelled the scores just before the interval.

The back-to-back Bangladesh Premier League champions then added further goals through Mamunul Islam's strike and Mohammed Rony's brace in the final 18 minutes of the tie to close out the win.

The result meant a winner-take-all showdown with FC Alga in the final tie in Group B, but the sides could not be separated after Ildar Amirov's opener in the first half was cancelled out by Onuoha 12 minutes from the end.

The point, though, was all that Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi needed due to their superior goal difference over their hosts and they joined K-Electric in advancing to February's play-offs.

The draw for the 2016 AFC Cup group stage is set to take place in December, with the preliminary rounds taking place at the end of January and start of February ahead of the final round of play-offs later that month.



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**Group A**

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
Thailand	3	3	0	0	17	1	16 9
Myanmar	3	2	0	1	8	8	0 6
Cambodia	3	1	0	2	2	4	-2 3
Laos	3	0	0	3	1	15	-14 0

23/06/15 25/06/15
 Myanmar 3 Cambodia 0 Myanmar 1 Thailand 7
 Thailand 9 Laos 0 Laos 0 Cambodia 2
 24/06/15
 Cambodia 0 Thailand 1
 Laos 1 Myanmar 4

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
Vietnam	3	3	0	0	14	4	10 9
Malaysia	3	1	1	1	8	8	0 4
Philippines	3	1	1	1	5	6	-1 4
Singapore	3	0	0	0	3	12	-9 0

23/06/15 25/06/15
 Vietnam 3 Philippines 0 Singapore 1 Malaysia 3
 24/06/15 Vietnam 6 Singapore 1 Malaysia 2 Philippines 2
 Philippines 3 Singapore 1 Malaysia 3 Vietnam 5

Semi-Finals

27/06/15
 Thailand 6 Malaysia 1
 Vietnam 1 Myanmar 1 AET
 Vietnam win 6-5 on penalties

Third Place Play-off

28/06/15
 Malaysia 2 Myanmar 6

Final

28/06/15
 Thailand 1 Vietnam 2

Hosts Vietnam Land Second ASEAN Crown

Hosts Vietnam claimed a second AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championship for the ASEAN Zone in June after recording a 2-1 comeback win over defending champions Thailand in the final.

Anupha Noinueai had given Group A winners Thailand, who beat Malaysia 6-1 in the semi-finals, the lead after 38 minutes at Vietnam YFTC Field.

But after Nguyen Thi Thu Huong pulled Group B winners Vietnam level a minute before the hour mark, Ngan Thi Van Su struck seven minutes later to ensure the hosts followed up their penalty shootout success over Myanmar in the semi-finals to claim a second crown having won the inaugural tournament in 2013 after then edging out Thailand at the top of the round-robin table.

Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Thu Hien was named the tournament's MVP, while Thailand's Amarawadee Phukhao and Porntip Thongwijit shared the top goal scorer accolade with six goals each.

Vietnam had opened their campaign with a 3-0 win over the Philippines in Group B thanks to a quickfire second half brace from Nguyen Thi Hang, while Malaysia began with a 3-1 win over Singapore.

And Vietnam secured their place in the semi-finals as Thu Huong's first half hat-trick sealed a

5-3 win over Malaysia, while the Philippines kept their qualification hope alive with a 3-1 victory over Singapore.

Vietnam then rounded off their group stage campaign with a 6-1 win over Singapore, with Malaysia completing the semi-finals line-up after sharing a 2-2 draw with the Philippines.

Thailand had made the perfect start to the defence of their title with a 9-0 win over Laos thanks to two goals each from Amarawadee, Porntip and Anupha, while Myanmar beat Cambodia 3-0 in the other Group A opener.

Anupha was again on target as Thailand maintained their 100% record with a 1-0 win over Cambodia, with Myanmar beating Laos 4-1 as the pair secured their places in the semi-finals with a game to spare.

But it was Thailand who advanced as group winners with Amarawadee and Porntip again at the double as the defending champions came from behind to record a 7-1 win over Myanmar, while Cambodia posted a 2-0 win over Laos.

In the semi-finals, Vietnam needed penalties to eventually edge out Myanmar following a 1-1 draw after extra-time, while two goals each from Amarawadee and Porntip saw Thailand earn their place in the final with a 6-1 win over Malaysia.

And with Vietnam edging out Thailand to claim the title, Myanmar recovered to claim third place with a 6-2 win over Malaysia.

AFC Takes Steps To Improving Standards

The first AFC National Coaches Conference took place in Malaysia in August, with the three day event laying the foundations for a pan-Asian coaching convention aimed at raising standards across the continent.

The three-day conference, an initiative introduced by new AFC Technical Director Andy Roxburgh, was attended by national team coaches and technical staff from the majority of AFC Member Associations including 2015 AFC Asian Cup-winning coach Ange Postecoglou, Iran's Carlos Queiroz and Mahdi Ali from the United Arab Emirates.

"This is an important event for the further development of Asian football," said AFC Acting General Secretary Dato' Windsor John.

"The conference is a platform for sharing experiences and providing feedback, and the AFC is here to listen to the coaches, technical directors and experts to help us chart Asian football's future together."

Former France national team coach and technical director Gerard Houllier, Iraq's Akram Salman and China's Alain Perrin, as well as Korea Republic assistant Shin Tae-yong, were amongst those to address the delegates on a range of issues.

The conference also reviewed the 2015 AFC Asian Cup, while refereeing and medical issues were also analysed.



"Success in football can happen through chance or design," said AFC Technical Director Roxburgh.

"We prefer design. Four main elements that can create success are coach education, player development, technical exchange and intense competition."

Following the conference, the first steps towards an AFC Coaching Convention were taken at a meeting of the newly appointed AFC Coach Education Panel.

Approved by the AFC Executive Committee in July, the convention will seek to raise coaching standards by setting a higher and unified standard for the training of coaches at all levels

"A well organised AFC Coaching Convention will ensure increased coaching standards across the continent," added Roxburgh.

"Creating and implementing the convention will require efforts by all of us and

I am happy to see there is real commitment to design a successful future for Asian football.

"I would like to congratulate the AFC President and Executive Committee for having approved this initiative: having a common coaching convention for all AFC Member Associations will help educate coaches and give them more recognition. I look forward to taking this work further with my AFC Coach Education Panel colleagues."

The AFC Coach Education Panel will now start working on the contents of the convention and a draft will be submitted to the AFC Technical Committee for its approval.

AFC Asian Cup Agreement Signed

The 2019 AFC Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates reached its first milestone in June as AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa and UAE Football Association President Yousef Yaqoob Yousef Al Serkal signed the Organising Association Agreement for the continental showpiece.

The UAE, who finished third at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia, were confirmed as hosts of the expanded 24-team tournament in March.

Qualifying for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup is currently ongoing, with the winners and four best runners-up from the second round of joint qualifiers advancing directly to the continental championship as well as the final round of qualifying for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.



Executive Committee Holds First Meeting



The newly elected AFC Executive Committee held its first meeting in Bahrain in July chaired by AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa. The Executive Committee, including 12 new members elected at March's AFC Ordinary Congress, discussed the upcoming FIFA Presidential elections, initial proposals on the future of coach education and player development presented by AFC Technical Director Andy Roxburgh, as well as a new Vision and Mission for the confederation which will form the basis of the AFC's future Strategic Plan.

"A new FIFA President will soon be elected at an Extraordinary Congress. The AFC Executive Committee has agreed on the importance of having a common position in order to best defend and promote Asian football," said AFC President Shaikh Salman.

"I will, together with Asia's other representatives to the FIFA Executive Committee, ensure that this common position is heard within FIFA and with the other Confederations."

The next meeting of the AFC Executive Committee will be held in New Delhi, India, on 28 November.



Club Licensing Administration System Discussed

The newly introduced Club Licensing Administration System was discussed at a workshop in Malaysia in July.

The online portal allows clubs to comply with the Club Licensing Criteria, while Member Associations can benefit from the transparency and administrative control of National Club Licensing.

"As you have seen, we are taking club licensing to the next level by introducing CLAS," said AFC Acting General Secretary Dato' Windsor John.

"For the last couple of

years, we were working hard to spread club licensing across MAs in Asia. And we have been fairly successful at that. The presence of you all here today is testament to our success in spreading club licensing.

"But we are not here to be content with quantity alone. Now that we have the numbers, we want to see the quality of club licensing improve.

"We have to work together to improve ourselves on qualitative terms. CLAS is the direct result of our continuous efforts in quality development."



FIFA Referees Instructors Course Concluded

Two FIFA Futuro III referee instructing courses concluded in the Saudi Arabian city of Dammam at the start of September.

A total of 23 participants finished the Referee Technical Instructor Course, while 13 completed the Referee Fitness Instructor Course.

The objectives of the courses were, among others, to increase the quality of refereeing instructors from FIFA Member Associations and to present new teaching materials and teaching and learning tools for this year's activities.

"The main idea of these courses is to achieve uniformity

in the interpretation and implementation of the Laws of the Game. FIFA uses the same methodology to conduct courses across the world," said AFC Referees Committee Deputy Chairman Hany Taleb Balan.

"We are also happy to note that most participants were more confident after the courses and hope that they will work together with the referees technically and practically to develop referees into elite officials who can represent not only the AFC but also FIFA.

"We'd like to urge the participants to continue implementing the lessons they learned here and impart them to their respective provinces and cities."

Draw For Futsal Qualifiers Takes Place

The draw for the 2016 AFC Futsal Championship qualifiers took place in Malaysia at the start of September with 22 teams out to join automatic qualifiers Japan, Iran, Kuwait and host Uzbekistan at next year's finals.

Defending champions Japan claimed a third AFC Futsal Championship in 2014 after edging out 10-time winners Iran 3-0 on penalties in the final following a 2-2 draw after extra-time in Vietnam.

Uzbekistan had already earned qualification for the final after claiming third place with a 2-1 win over Kuwait in the third place play-off two years ago before being named as hosts meaning Kuwait were also automatically handed a place in the finals draw.

The West Zone sees teams split over two groups to vie for the two qualification places offered to the group winners, with the qualifiers set to take place in Malaysia in October. Two of hosts Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan or Afghanistan will qualify from November's Central Zone qualifiers, while two of Mongolia, Chinese Taipei, China, Korea Republic or Hong Kong will advance from the East Zone qualifiers which will be played in Mongolia in November.

The ASEAN qualifiers will be played in Thailand, with four qualification places available, although they were not included in the draw for the 16-team AFC Futsal Championship, which will be played in Tashkent between February 10-21 next year.



Myanmar Workshop Takes Place



A four day workshop under the AFC's Kick Off Project took place in Myanmar in August which focused on club marketing and club finance.

The decision to focus on these two areas followed a visit by an AFC Special Missions Team to Myanmar last July.

Representatives from all 12 Myanmar National League clubs and 10 second division teams took part in the workshop.

"We have introduced club licensing regulations for entry into the Myanmar National League based on AFC standards," said Myanmar Football Federation Chief Executive Officer U Than Zaw.

"These regulations provide a professional structure for our clubs and we are very grateful to the AFC for these workshops, which provide additional content to strengthen this professional structure."



KICK OFF
AFC Development Programme

India To Host AFC Annual Awards

Indian capital New Delhi has been confirmed as the hosts of the 2015 AFC Annual Awards that is set for 29 November.

The decision was confirmed by the newly elected AFC Executive Committee during a meeting in the Bahraini capital of Manama in July.

"The AFC is delighted to take the Annual Awards to New Delhi, India this year," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa. "India is a country where football is developing fast, and it is the ideal place to bring the whole Asian football family together."



Seoul World Cup Stadium

Seoul, Korea Republic

The 66,704 capacity Seoul World Cup Stadium finished construction in December 2001 ahead of the 2002 FIFA World Cup jointly hosted by Korea Republic and Japan.

Located in the Seongsan-dong neighbourhood of the Mapo-gu district in the Korea Republic capital, and composed of a main stadium,

supplementary stadium and three futsal stadiums which are accessible to Seoul citizens and youth football clubs, the venue's first usage was as host of the opening game of the 2002 FIFA World Cup between then defending champions France and Senegal.

The stadium also held the group stage match between Turkey and China and the semi-final between Korea and Germany as the hosts were edged out by the eventual runners-up.

The second largest stadium in Korea after Seoul Olympic Stadium, Seoul World Cup Stadium has also been the host for FIFA World Cup qualifiers and the 2007 FIFA U-17 World Cup, as well as Korea's friendly against Brazil in October 2013.

The venue is also home to K-League Classic side FC Seoul and was the setting for the first leg of the 2013 AFC Champions League final.





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“I think that there is a need for players who are able to create chances from nothing. For me personally, that’s the kind of player I am trying to become. It’s incredibly important to have players who can keep creating chances when nothing seems on, and I always have that awareness.”

TAKASHI USAMI